

海道左近
イラストタイキ

Infinite Dendrogram

可能性の始まり

Chapter 0

Tutorial

<Infinite Dendrogram>

□ 7/15/2043

July 15, 2043.

Sixty years after the creation of a revolutionary device, one that left its mark in the entire history of gaming, a certain game was released.

<Infinite Dendrogram> was its title.

<Infinite Dendrogram>, that for some sort of reason was named with the meaning of “Infinite Tree Diagram” by its producers, was a Full Dive VRMMO (Virtual Reality Massively Multiplayer Online) game—a term used for games where its users could plunge themselves in a virtual world and play there... it was truly the realization of a long-sought dream.

For nearly half a century, people themselves had fantasized about that immersive technology; in the 2000s, manga, anime and even video games started using stories that involved Full Dive VRMMOs. Then, around the 2010s, the world saw the announcement of something that had commonly appeared within those fictional works, one of the long-awaited dreams related to VRMMO games: a headgear that produced sounds and displayed images to enhance the feeling of immersion within games, producing a pseudo-VR. Then, starting in the 2030s, they were still few in number, but Full Dive VRMMOs encompassing all five senses finally began their release.

Due to the massive costs for the development and its high degree of difficulty, only manufacturers with great financial power and advanced technological strength were able to get involved in the production of

those devices, resulting in the small quantity of new products being launched. There were even cases with companies that still tried, but couldn't complete their products.

Either way, only a few Full Dive VRMMOs were released to the world. And yet, even those few quickly ended up being... a disappointment.

The first one of them, <NEXT WORLD>, became a laughing stock among its users on its very launch date.

Although it had been hyped as “not any different from reality,” <Next World> actually *lacked* in reality: the players’ five senses were continuously assaulted by an uncomfortable feeling, a result of the crude attempt at reproducing them in the virtual world. It had also been declared to boast the “next-generation graphics, in their truest sense,” but it actually was nearly identical to the CG generated by a traditional game console. In addition, advertisements had circulated around, indicating that players would be able to “immerse themselves in a different world through the dive machine.” Instead, like any ordinary game, they could only play in an environment shaped by the real world. Lastly, the producer’s biggest emphasis was on the guarantee of the game’s “safety and security design.” However, in the middle of and after their playing sessions, people would fall ill, one after the other, and get carried to the hospital.

Because of those circumstances, <Next World>, the first Full Dive VRMMO, suffered a massive hit to its sales and reputation. Then, along with the crushing defeat it received in the lawsuits moved by those who had their health damaged, the game’s development company went bankrupt. A certain reviewer used the following words to describe their impressions about <Next World>: “*They managed to create the gaming device of our dreams, but couldn’t build our dreams with it.*”

Since then, several Full Dive VRMMOs were developed, but not a single one of them could be called “successful”—that is, until the launch of <Infinite Dendrogram>.

Before the game was released, the amount of information out there related to <Infinite Dendrogram> was absolutely zero. And while still unknown to the people, on its launch date, there was only an announcement conducted on the TV and internet in the whole world. In that announcement, the makers of the game presented four selling points: First, they guaranteed a complete sense of reality within <Infinite Dendrogram>. The game would be able to perfectly reproduce all five senses. However, users would be allowed to turn the feeling of pain ON or OFF, letting them play without any worries.

Second, the game had a single server. For example, even if there were hundreds of millions of players, everyone would get to play together in the same world.

Third, it was possible to select individual kinds of graphics. From a realistic view to 3DCG or 2D animation, players would be able to decide how they would like to see the game world.

Fourth, there was a divergence between the time in the real world and in the game. Inside <Infinite Dendrogram>, time ran three times faster than reality.

Around the world, every VRMMO user who saw that announcement was taken aback.

“Is that really possible?”

“Just how much money and technological skill was needed to realize that?” they thought.

And then, there was the jeering:

“If you’re going to hype it as something it isn’t, then try to at least make the advertisement appear real and believable.”

Although the game’s unveiling simultaneously impacted the entire world, its contents were simply too ridiculous to be true. Consequently, including those who originally didn’t plan to touch the game, 99.9998% of the users thought the announcement was

unbelievable; they simply assumed that everything was a massive lie and refused to buy it.

However, the 0.0002% left had something different in mind.

“It’s hard to believe that, but if they’re telling the truth...”

“Let’s try it.”

“I believe it.”

While thinking as such, they went to a game store and bought < Infinite Dendrogram >.

The cost for the dedicated machine was around 10,000 Japanese Yen, a price beyond any precedents; it was viewed as a reckless act done by the game’s manufacturers, but still managed to give a boost to the sales. *“Well, even if they are lying, it’s just ten thousand yen,”* the users rationalized before buying and playing it.

They would then understand that < Infinite Dendrogram > was the real deal.

At the degree of reality from the game, everyone was dazed. Because of the graphics, they went wild with joy. And finally, there was the utter amazement after logging out and looking at the clock.

Everything was true. That was the moment the game console of their dreams became reality.

A day after the launch date, when the world found itself in uproar over the comments and reviews done by the early adopters, the producers released a second announcement.

It was about the contents of the game.

The presenter, a man who identified himself as the development manager of < Infinite Dendrogram >, named “Lewis Carroll”, appeared on TV and the internet to say the following: “Yesterday, we explained the main elements of the game, so today we are going to

describe its system.”

“I believe that those who are already playing have noticed it, but there is a certain feature in <Infinite Dendrogram>.”

“It provides, in the true sense of the word, an infinite number of possibilities to the players, allowing them to create their unique playstyle.”

“More than the combination of over a thousand jobs and skill configurations, this feature brings the clear meaning of ‘unique’.”

“Every single player within <Infinite Dendrogram> is gifted an <Embryo>.”

“Depending on your action patterns, experience points, biorhythm and personality, your <Embryo> will evolve in an infinite number of ways.”

“It is not a case of simply ‘changing colors or parts’—including your own peculiar skills, there are limitless patterns to explore.”

“And that is exactly what is the—<Infinite Dendrogram>.”

“Indeed, <Infinite Dendrogram> offers a brand new world for everyone and a unique potential for each one of you.”

Those words were the last thing needed to turn the Full Dive VRMMO, <Infinite Dendrogram>, a great hit around the world.



□ Mukudori Reiji^[1]
3/16/2045

I, Mukudori Reiji, was sitting on my heels^[2] right in front of the game package. I could feel, with every fiber of my body, just how nervous I was right now. Okay, I might have been exaggerating a bit, but the fact was that, after one and a half year, I was finally able to

play this game, <Infinite Dendrogram>. So of course I was feeling nervous.

“Man, what a long journey it was.”

The launch date was in the summer of my second year of high school. Yeah, both the game’s announcement and release came *right* when I had decided to focus everything on my university entrance exams. At that time, there might have been students in the second and third years that, due to their love for games, despaired just like me. Well, I also had this same thought during my preparations for the high school entrance exams, but *why is it that every interesting game always came out in the exam seasons?*

Still, at long last, my situation had changed.

I passed without any problems for a university in Tokyo. Also, with my successful admission, I took the opportunity to start living alone.

Right now, at this very moment in my life, I could play to my heart’s content!

The moving had been completed yesterday, and after helping me with it, my family was already back at home. So today in the morning, immediately after the stores’ opening hours, I headed straight to a game shop and bought <Infinite Dendrogram>. Apparently, six months after the release date, there was a real shortage of the game, so people started selling it at exorbitant prices. But as one would have expected, one year and a half was enough for things to calm down and let me buy the game normally.

Incidentally, my older brother was one of the people who bought the game on day one. During those nearly two years, he pestered me through phone calls with, “Hurry up, man, let’s *dendrogram* alreadyyy.” I felt so bitter, jealous and.....

Anyway, those feelings were going to end today!

“...Let’s do it!”

Steeling myself, I opened the package.

Inside that box was a helmet-like game device and a manual. After taking a look at the book, I found that you apparently needed to wear the helmet and then turn its switch on. There was also a lot of information regarding the ingame visuals and clock, but the only word I could find to describe them was “awesome”.

Really, how did they manage to create such a game? When compared to the current state of the art, I had the feeling that this level of technology would have only been possible to achieve in, like, ten or twenty years.

But I couldn't be a coward now.

Following the instructions, I placed the device on my head and, according to the recommended posture drawn in the book, laid face-up on my bed.

Then, I turned the game switch on.

In an instant, my vision darkened.



“Oka~ay, welcome and nice to meet you, dear custome~er.”

When I came to my senses, instead of being in my bedroom, I found myself in some kind of room.

The interior of the place made it look like the study of a wooden, western-styled residence. And before my eyes, there was a strange cat talking to me while sitting on a rocking chair, its nice-looking seat also something made of wood, by the way.

...Wait, a cat?

“Sorry for intruding here.”

Even though I had no idea what was going on right now, I tried to at

least return the greeting first.

“Yes, very go~od. I really like those who are poli~ite.”

The cat was talking in perfect Japanese.

However, for some reason, it kept stretching the end of every sentence.

“Is this something like the login screen of the game?”

“More or le~ess. This is just the entra~ance. Here, I will first have you set up a series of options and only then you will enter <Infinite Dendrogram>, you se~e. Ah, I am the Managing AI No. 13 of <Infinite Dendrogram>, Cheshi~ire. Nice to meet yo~ou.”

A Managing AI... I see, no wonder it was giving such complex answers. This kind of Artificial Intelligence had an entire supercomputer for its brains and, as its name implied, was mainly used for management operations. It was said that even a single one of those was capable of managing, with speed and perfection, the databases and networks of a small country.

Since this one was the “Managing AI No. 13,” it meant that there were, at least, another *twelve* AIs of the same level engaged in the management of this game.

“Pleased to meet you too.”

“Alri~ight. First, let’s decide on the view settings, oka~ay? We will run several graphics samples, so choose whichever option you li~ike.”

After the Cheshire... cat explained, the scenery around me completely changed. The area of the study grew larger, turning into some kind of European town from the Middle Ages. There were a lot of people walking around here, but their figures kept switching at a constant pace... or rather, it was *how I was seeing things* that was actually changing.

First, there was the usual reality view, then there was the CG and,

finally, the anime view. Also, the last one didn't look like a *rendered CG* animation, it actually had all the characteristics of the 2D anime you saw on TV.

“...Wait a moment, how are you doing this?”

“The images perceived by your sight eventually get processed by your brain, ri~ight? So we just use some similar method to change how you perceive thi~ings. Anyway, what will you choo~ose? Oh, by the way, you can also use an item to select a different option late~er.”

“Alright, this one.”

I decided that, until I'd gotten somewhat used to the game, it would be better to go with what I had always played. Okay, I was also curious about how it would feel to touch things in anime-style.

“Oka~ay.”

With the cat's words, the scenery returned to the previous study.

“Your Player Name is next. What are you going to use for your ingame na~ame?”

“Ray Starling.”

This was a name I had often used in other games. Well, it was just a pun with my first name and the English meaning for my family name, “Gray Starling”.

“Confirme~ed. Next, we're setting your appeara~ance.”

Cheshire continued and a blank mannequin appeared before me, along with a great number of screens. Inside those displays were words such as “Height”, “Weight” and “Bust Size”, with a sliding bar next to each of them—there were even screens filled with various kinds of eyes and noses.

“This is...”

“You can use the sliding bar and the parts there to define your ingame appearance—your avatar, that i~is. Ah, you can even create an animal avatar and look just like me~e.”

Was what it said to me, but...

There were way too many parts and sliding bars, so I had no idea which one I should've began with.

“It’s fine to consider it slo~owly. Remember that the time outside runs three times slower than he~ere. Aahh, but there were some people who spent an entire month, in Earth-time, to create their avatars... they kept logging in and logging out until the character was done...”

That was some amazing effort and concentration. I didn’t think I could ever manage do that. Moreover, if an amateur like me were to try a hand at this, with the excessively fine modeling provided here, there was no doubt that the work would end in a huge failure. This isn’t about playing a game, I’m talking about something like making a *real human’s face*.

If that was the case, then...

“Can I use my real appearance as the default and then manipulate it a little?”

“Of co~ourse.”

The cat lightly waved its tail.

Immediately, the mannequin became a perfect copy of myself.

“Now you can use this as the base for your avata~ar.”

“Thank you.”

After that, everything was relatively easy.

I changed the eye color, turned the hair blond, increased the height

a little bit, kept the other facial features the same and even tried to change the avatar's species.

...By the way, I wondered how my face would turn out in anime or CG style... somehow, this was worrying me. Shouldn't I first try logging in the game with my normal appearance, acquire one of those items and then change the visual settings?

But then playing online with my real face was obviously...

“...Nah, forget it.”

Following that, it took thirty minutes for the modeling of my character to be completed.

“And... I'm done.”

“Oka~ay. Then I'll be distributing your starter ite~ems.”

Cheshire raised its cat paw towards the ceiling and waved it. A second later, a bag appeared from nothing and fell down.

“This is Ray's storage bag, the so-called Item Box, you se~e? Inside it, there's a distinct dimensional space that you can use for stora~age. Incidentally, please keep in mind that only Ray's belongings can go in the~ere. If something isn't yours, it won't get inside the ba~ag.”

“I see.”

While it was a really convenient bag, you couldn't use it to commit crimes.

“We~ell, it's a different case if you collect the items randomly dropped when performing PK^[3], or steal items with the 《Theft》 skill, so don't forget thi~is.”

“.....”

What did that cat just say?

“Speaking of whi~ich. People with a high level in the 《Theft》 skill can even steal items from your 4D Pocke—I mean, Item Bo~ox. Be carefu~ul.”

How could I even begin to “be careful” of such Sci-Fi thieves that were able to mess with *dimensional spaces*?

“By the way, that one is for beginners, but there are various other types of ba~ags. Like, there are bags that are harder to steal from, others that are smaller, bags with large capacity and mo~ore.”

“Oh, then what is that capacity for this one?”

“Internally, it should be roughly the size of a normal classroom, I gue~ess. And, hmm, converting to Earth units, maybe it can hold about one ton in we~eight?”

“That’s quite a lot. It’s enough for me.”

“Apparently, it’s not enough for those who want to be mercha~ants. I wonder if they end up buying a new o~one.”

Then, I remembered my days as a first-year in high school; during that period, I worked part-time and got to know how a supplier’s warehouse was. So yeah, I didn’t think a single classroom’s worth of space would be enough, at all.

“Ah, since the contents of your Item Box will scatter around if it gets completely destroyed, you must pay attention to its durability, oka~ay?”

“I will.”

“Then, let’s choose your beginner’s equipment no~ow. Which one will you pick, Ra~ay?”

The Cheshire cat took a catalog from the bookshelf and showed it to me.

I could take note of various sets of armor in that book. There were

Japanese and—of course—Western clothing, things such as Chinese, Indian, Arabian and South American traditional costumes—and surprisingly, even outfits from Sci-Fi movies.

“Let’s go with this.”

What I chose was a jacket and shirt combo, along with jeans and a bandana. This was vaguely similar to the main character of a certain RPG from the last century, a game that was considered a masterpiece. They might have looked a bit old-fashioned, but due to my brother’s influence I had also been playing retro games, so these clothes actually matched my tastes.

“Oka~ay. Then, choose your initial weapon he~ere.”

The animal opened a different page in the catalog.

Wooden and mock swords without a blade, knifes, bows, slings, staves and a lot more; all kinds of weapons were listed there.

“A knife then.”

It went well with the clothing.

“Oka~ay. Now that you have chosen your equipment and weapon, there we... go~o!”

I didn’t know if it was trying to get fired up or not, but with Cheshire’s yell, my whole figure was changed. My own clothes were switched with the ones I had previously selected and a knife appeared, hanging from a belt around my waist.

Wow, when I looked at the full-length mirror provided by the cat, I could say with certainty that it was going to suit my avatar really well.

“Oh, that’s right, here’s your initial mone~ey.”

It then handed me five coins. Hm, looks like they were made of silver, I guess.

“Five silver coins amounts to 5000 Lirs^[4], you se~e. Incidentally, a single onigiri^[5] costs about 10 lirs, oka~ay?”

If that was the case, then 1 Lir should've been roughly equivalent to 10 yen. So, all in all, 5000 lirs was a pretty hefty sum.

“Is it really fine to begin with such a huge amount of money?”

“Yeah, you'll need to find some source of income before you spend all of tha~at.”

Apparently, this was the only monetary support they gave to players. I would have to carefully plan how I used this cash.

“Well then, at long last, let's bestow your <Embryo> no~ow.”

“Oohh, it's the rumored...”

<Embryo>.

As I'd heard, it was the biggest feature of <Infinite Dendrogram>. Bringing a literally infinite variation to the game, the <Embryo> was something unique to each player. People even said that it went beyond the scope of items and equipment; it was a feature that was treated by them as a *partner*. My brother, who was already a veteran in the game, once affirmed that “even if the game weren't such a well-made VRMMO, or were just a *simple* MMO, with the *Embryo* system it would have still been a huge success.”

“There's an explanation for the <Embryo>, you kno~ow?”

“Well, since you mentioned that, I'll listen to it, I guess?”

It was always a good idea to hear the tutorial for a game's characteristic system.

“Oka~ay. Every player receives an identical Embryo in the beginning, but that only goes for its 0th and initial fo~orm. Starting with the 1st form, it will suffer entirely different changes according to

its own~er.”

Yeah, that was nice. As I thought, hearing about a “unique element just for you” would get any gamer interested in it.

“They may be infinitely varied, but <Embryos> are more or less separated into categori~ies.”

“Ah, I didn’t know that.”

Because I tried avoiding “spoilers” at all costs, of course. I had the feeling that, in the past, if I learned more stuff about the game, I would have given up on my exams due to the urge to play. Even from my brother, the only information I heard was that it was “really fun.” Maybe he had also been worried about my exams, because he didn’t say anything in specific...

“Roughly speaking, the categories a~are:

- The weapon, armor or tool kind, able to be equipped by players:
TYPE: Arms;
- The monster kind, able to guard players: TYPE: Guardna;
- The vehicle kind, able to be ridden by players: TYPE: Chariot;
- The building kind, able to be used as a residence by players: TYPE: Castle;
- The boundary^[6] kind, able to be deployed by players: TYPE: Territory.

Or something like tha~at.”

“Oho.”

I already couldn’t wait to see how my <Embryo> was going to turn out.

“By the way, other than the ones I just mentioned, there are also

rare categories, evolved categories and even the “Only One” or Unique category. Getting one of these would be gre~eat.”

“So there was even something like that!.....Hm, wait a moment. If that’s the case, until their <Embryo> evolves into a rare category, what’s stopping people from remaking their characters?”

“Aa~ahh. It’s impossible to remake a character in this ga~ame.”

“Eh?”

“For example, even if someone tried to buy another device and start the game, their character and *Embryo* would still be the sa~ame. That’s because we keep a record of our user’s brainwave data, you se~e?”

“.....”

A record of the user’s brainwave data.

Yep, that was a little bit scary.

“Still, even if resetting a character was possible, this feature is something persona~al. So I believe the person’s *Embryo* would always turn out the sa~ame.”

“That’s right...”

“So~o. While we were talking, the <Embryo> bestowing process conclude~ed.”

“What?....Whoa!?”

Before I knew it, an oval shaped gem was embedded on the back of my left hand, its surface emitting a faint glow.

“And that is the <Embryo>, alri~ight? Since it’s still in the 0th form, it will be stuck to you like that, but when the <Embryo> hatches into the 1st form, it will detach from your ha~and.”

In other words, this was like incubating an egg and waiting for it to hatch...

“Incidentally, can this break while in egg form?”

“It wo~on’t. All the damage received by a oth *Embryo* will be redirected to the player, oka~ay?”

Ahh, I see. So even if a player died, their *Embryo* would be safe.

“However, from the 1st form onwards, it can be damaged and broken norma~ally. Even then, the *Embryo* will heal and restore itself after some ti~ime.”

Somehow, it looked like a living being.

“By the way, when the egg turns into its 1st form, the place where it was affixed will be tattooed with a cre~est. It is something like a proof that you are a player in this wo~orld. Otherwise, it would be impossible recognize who was a player or no~ot.”

“Ohh, really?”

Nah, but as expected, mistaking an NPC for a human would be..... possible...?

“In addition, the crest also has an effect that lets you store your <Embryo>, oka~ay? When you’re not doing anything with it, you should put it away inside your left ha~and. Whenever you’re playing, it will always be together with yo~ou. So please treat your <Embryo> with great ca~are.”

“Yeah.”

I still didn’t know how my *Embryo*

would evolve... but ultimately, since it depended on personal matters, I guess that things were going to take care of themselves.

“Nice to meetcha, partner.”

Obviously, there was no reply from it, but I had this slight feeling that it shone a little brighter.

“Now, finally, please choose the country you want to be affiliated with.”

Cheshire unfolded a map on the study’s desk. Although it was an “aged scroll” kind of map, when it was completely unfolded, it went through a transformation.

Rising from seven different points in that chart were pillars of light, with the place’s current townscape being projected inside each one of them.

“The countries depicted in each of these pillars are the ones you can initially join. The images you are seeing right now come from their respective capital cities.”

Around every pillar, written in floating words also made of light, were the names and descriptions of each nation.

With a white castle at its center, this townscape enclosed by walls looked exactly like one you would see in a western fantasy work. / The Country of Knights, 『Alter Kingdom』.

With buildings made of wood and cherry blossoms dancing and falling around them, this city had an imposing, Japanese-style castle overlooking everything. / The Country of Blades, 『Tenchi^[7]』.

A series of mountains on one side, each revealing a subtle and profound^[8] air around them, and a river on the city’s opposing side, its flow going on for eternity.^[9] / The Country of Martial Xian^[10], 『Kouga Empire^[11]』.

Above, the skies shrouded in clouds of black smoke. Below, the earth occupied by a city of steel, its countless factories releasing the pollutants that closed off the sky. / The Country of Machines, 『Imperial Nation of Driphe^[12]』.

A massive oasis with a bazaar lined up as close as possible to it, this place was surrounded by desert as far as the eye could see. / The Commercial Metropolitan County, 『Cardina』.

In the middle of the ocean, numerous, gigantic boats joined together to create an artificial island. / The Maritime State, 『Grand Valois^[13]』.

Built at the base of the World Tree^[14], deep inside a forest, this was an unexplored flower garden, a place where demi-humans such as the Elves and Fairies lived. / The Land^[15] of Fairies, 『Legendaria』.

“Oohh, whoaa...”

Honestly, I wanted to go to all of them.

Tenchi sure had the atmosphere of the Azuchi-Momoyama^[16] period; Kouga sounded like it was from a Chinese fantasy setting;

Driphe seemed to have robots;

I think I could easily get into a sightseeing mood just by walking around Cardina’s bazaar; There was this certain feeling I got from Grand Valois, about a man’s dream of heeding the sea’s call; Deciding for Legendaria was a no-brainer.

And yet...

“The Alter Kingdom, please.”

“Oka~ay. As an aside, this is just a minor survey, but why did you choose i~it?”

“My brother is waiting for me there...”

“Ah, is that so...”

Immediately after I had bought the game, I called my older brother while still in front of the shop, and he said, “Then I’ll be waiting for you at the capital of the Alter Kingdom.”

...Yeah, since he was there, there was no other option for me.

Now that I think about it, why did someone like my brother choose that Kingdom? If I wasn't mistaken, he was supposed to love stuff like robots, battleships, etc, so why didn't he go to Driphe or Grand Valois?

Well, only the person himself could answer that anyway.

"Don't feel down about it, there will be events later that'll let you change your affiliated co~ountry."

"Oh, thank you..."

Come on, pull yourself together.

Even though the Alter Kingdom looked like a normal-ish country, it might turn out to be pretty good in the end.

"Well then, Altea, the Royal Capital of the Alter Kingdom, awaits yo~ou. Time to fly awa~ay."

"Ah, please wait a moment. What objective should I be aiming for in this game?"

The games I'd played since my childhood—even the online ones—always had an objective like defeating an evil god or a demon king. That was why I had to ask Cheshire if <Infinite Dendrogram> was the same...

"Anythi~ing."

Was how it replied.

"Anything...?"

"Exactly, anythi~ing. You can be a Hero or a Demon King. You can be a king or a slave. You can be the good guy or the bad guy. You can do something or do nothing. You can stay in <Infinite Dendrogram> or leave <Infinite Dendrogram>. You are free to do anything. You can do anything here, provided it is something possible to do."

The cat's tone changed.

"The same goes for the <Embryo> in your hand. Starting now, there will be an infinite number of possibilities for it."

Dropping its previous, stupid way of talking, Cheshire now seemed to be reading from a script.

"Welcome to <Infinite Dendrogram>. 'We' accept you with open arms."

As soon as it said these words, the surrounding study vanished. The desk, bookshelf, even the Cheshire cat disappeared without a trace—I, myself, was floating in the sky, though.

"Eh?"

Looking below, I could recognize the figure of the world there.

I was looking down at the shape of a continent that, just a while ago, I had observed in the map.

Eventually, with my chosen country—the Alter Kingdom—as the destination, my body started heading towards the correct point in the land, as if being absorbed by it—and falling at an incredibly high speed.

And that was how I set foot in the world of <Infinite Dendrogram>.

Footnotes

1. [↑] 棕鳥玲二 – Mukudori Reiji. “Mukudori” (棕鳥) means a type of bird (Gray Starling for example), but can also have the meaning of “country bumpkin” or someone gullible. “Reiji” (玲二) uses the kanji for “Sound of Jewels” (玲/Rei) and “Two” (二/Ji).
2. [↑] 正座 – The “Seiza” position of sitting.
3. [↑] PK – Player Kill, or the act of killing players (ingame of course).
4. [↑] リル – Lir (or Ler, perhaps?)
5. [↑] Onigiri – The famous rice ball. Should I keep the “onigiri” term or just translate it anyway as “rice ball”?
6. [↑] 結界 – The word used here is “Kekkai”, or “Borderline”, often used with the meaning of “Barrier” too.
7. [↑] 天地 – Tenchi, or “Heaven and Earth”, the “Universe”. Since it’s a country’s name, I’m keeping the “Tenchi” name.
8. [↑] 幽玄 – The word here is “Yuugen”, a concept of “mysterious beauty” or similar. You can see more about it here
<http://just.thinkofit.com/word-of-the-day-yugen-%E5%B9%BD%E7%8E%84/>
9. [↑] 悠久 – And here is the concept of “Eternity”.
10. [↑] 武仙 – In Chinese, “武仙” (wǔ xiān) means “Martial (arts) Immortal” (thanks horr1bl3cpu for the heads up), used for example in the name for the Hercules Constellation (武仙座). In Japanese, it is (normally) written as “Busen” or “Arms/Military Hermit”. I’m going with the Chinese wording of “Xian” as it is at least a bit known.
11. [↑] 黄河 – “Kouga” or Yellow River. In China, it is spelled as “Huáng Hé”, the third longest river in Asia. The description of the river makes some sense then, with the Empire named after the big river that passes through it.
12. [↑] ドライフ皇国 – The Driphe(?) Empire. “皇国” or “Koukoku” can be translated as Empire and there isn’t a clear difference between that word and “帝国” or “Teikoku” used for the Kouga Empire. However, “皇国” is commonly used to represent “The Empire (of Japan)” while “帝国” usually refers to empires such as the Macedonian. Because the author went out of his way to make that distinction, I used “Imperial Nation” instead of “Empire”.
13. [↑] グランバロア – Grand Valois(?). Suggestions are appreciated.

14. [↑] 世界樹 – The “World Tree”, usually referred as Yggdrasil.
15. [↑] 妖精郷 – It's something like “Elven Home Town”. The kanji “郷” can mean “Native Place”, “Hometown”, “Village” and even “District”.
16. [↑] 安土桃山時代 – The Azuchi-Momoyama period (around 1558-1600). You should've probably heard about Oda Nobunaga. He was active in that period.

Chapter 1

Experiencing The World

□ Ray Starling
Royal Capital, Altea
Before the Southern Gates

“Damn, that freaked me out...”

After being suddenly dropped from the sky, I had been taking a breather here, trying to calm my racing heart down.

I could still feel and remember some of the sensations from that fall.

The clear, yet quick-changing scenery.

The whistling sounds as my own body cut through the air at high speeds, descending.

The coldness of the atmosphere touching my skin.

The scent of the wind, one completely new to me.

And then, after an unnatural and also uneventful landing... the taste of soil as I fell over due to all the confusion.

As for the pain, I didn't feel any. Looked like it was something set to “OFF” in the default game settings. Even then, I could experience this entire world through all my five senses—everything seemed so real it didn't feel any different from reality.

“But... this is the real deal.”

A real, Full Dive VRMMO.

I was experiencing it first-hand, the true realization of the game that everyone dreamed of.

Even though the initial rush of adrenaline faded, I could say I finally made the plunge into the world of <Infinite Dendrogram>.

When I casually surveyed my surroundings, I noticed some enormous gates behind me. Connected to them were white walls so high you'd strain your neck while looking at their top. Additionally, a soldier working as the gatekeeper was there, his body clad in a western-looking armor.

I had already seen those gates from one of the sceneries displayed in Cheshire's room so, apparently, this must've been Altea, the Royal Capital of the Alter Kingdom. The entranceway that lead to the city was already open, and since a while ago a number of carriages and people kept either moving inside, or going outside of the capital's grounds.

It seemed like you could enter Altea just like that. But since this was my first time here, I timidly—or rather, suspiciously—passed through the gates. Thus, without any problems, I managed to enter the city.

“Alright.”

Yep, apparently anyone could freely access and leave this area, the very capital of the Alter Kingdom. Since I'd already made it safely inside the town, I just needed to go and find my brother at the meeting place he had previously mentioned.

“If I'm not wrong, it was the Great Fountain in the main street of the Royal Capital, I guess? He told me I would arrive there after entering the city and walking straight ahead, but... hmm, just in case, should I check it out?”

I then chanted 『Main Menu』 within my mind.

As soon as I did it, just how it had been mentioned in the manual, a game window appeared before me. Divided into two sections, the right

one displayed my simplified status, similar to what you would see in the party windows from RPGs; meanwhile, the left side displayed a series of menu entries such as 『Equipment』, 『Tools』, 『Detailed Status』 and so on.

Taking a glance at my own status, it indicated that I was level 0. Apparently, in this game each Job had its own level, so a person like me, who currently had no Job, was always stuck at that experience ranking.

“Map, Map... here it is.”

Searching through the menu items, I found the correct entry and launched it. Immediately, a new window popped up, displaying the map of the Royal Capital Altea.

Usually, it seemed that as long as you kept walking, this ingame Map would fill itself out with the locations you had visited; moreover, when buying a normal map from a vendor, all its information would get assimilated by your own Map.

The manual, however, indicated that there was an exception to that rule: a player’s capital city—their starting point—and its surroundings were already mapped for that user. Pretty convenient.

“Hm hm, I see.”

Altea was a town surrounded by circular walls. There were four gates connected to them, each one placed in a different cardinal direction: north, south, east and west. And extending towards the heart of the city, from every gate, was a large, straight pathway made of stone.

One would usually think that those four streets would, in the end, cut across each other, but that wasn’t really the case. From what I could see, the Noble’s District that existed there required a special license to enter. In addition, right in the middle of that district was the Royal Castle. Well, I didn’t think I had any need to go there for the time being.

Okay then, the main street my brother had talked about was probably this one, starting at the southern gates and going on until the Noble's District. Incidentally, since those were the same gates I'd crossed a while ago, if I followed the path ahead I would eventually reach the fountain.

With such thoughts in my mind, I looked at the map while walking and...

“Ngh!?”

“Eh?”

...met eyes with an unknown woman, *at an extremely close distance.*

If I were to give a reason for such an accident, it would be the fact that she had suddenly broken into a run from the side lane. Since I'd been carefully staring at the map, I didn't notice her until she'd gotten this close to me. As a result, I was too late to react and couldn't avoid the woman, so we ended up crashing into each other.

The outcome of it was that I was flung more than fifteen meters away.

“Oof...!”

With alarming thoughts going on in my head, it felt like I had suffered some damage. Looking at the game screen that was still open, the simplified status indicated that my HP had decreased by 80%. Moreover, it appeared that I had some broken bones now, as the abnormal statuses **【Left arm Fracture】** and **【Right leg Fracture】** were also displayed.

Hey, my body, how could you be so amazingly frail that just by colliding with a woman you managed to receive a fatal wound...

“A-Are you okay!?”

She then rushed over to me, her face pale. Along with her fluffy hair,

she was a woman of gentle facial features... which contrasted with the white and metallic, absurdly heavy-looking armor she was wearing. I wouldn't even be surprised if it weighed around 100kg or so; in the past, I had once experienced dressing in armor, so I could say that plate mail was something incredibly heavy for its usual thickness.

“I-I’m...”

“*I’m fine, that was nothing,*” was what I tried to say, but probably influenced by the massive damage it took, my entire body felt numb and my tongue couldn’t move well.

“Sorry! 《Force Heal》!”

For a moment, the woman’s hand glowed white, and from it appeared tiny particles of light that fell onto me. Immediately after, my HP recovered completely and the 【Fracture】statuses disappeared.

“Oh, whoaa...”

That was healing magic for you, I guess.

Being close to death and then getting a complete recovery. Seeing how the game world felt so real, I wondered if that experience was close to what you would have faced in reality. Hey, that was a bit scary.

“I’m truly sorry! I was running without properly paying attention to what was in front of me, and...”

“Ah, n-no, I wasn’t paying attention either... by the way, what about you? Are you alright?”

Well, considering that I had collided with enough force to receive a fatal wound, I wanted to see if she had been injured too. A meaningless thought, however, as she appeared to be completely unhurt.

...Ahh right, it was **that** situation.

Looks like this woman was a high level player equipped with very

strong items. And then, I guess, with her being so high leveled, her statuses must have been pretty high too. So, when she crashed into someone like me, who's level 0, it ended in a disastrous way for me.

“I’m okay. But you received such terrible injuries...”

“M-Miss, you have already kindly healed me, so I am fine, thank you.”

On top of naturally changing my tone to sound more polite, it wasn’t just my imagination that my voice faltered, I think; the damage done by the accident still frightened me.

“S-Speaking of which, you seemed to be in a great hurry. Did anything happen, miss?”

When I asked that, the woman made a gesture as if she had suddenly remembered something.

“Err, the truth is that my little sister ran out of our home, so I was looking for her.”

“Your little sister?”

“Yes, she’s the kid in this photo here. Did you happen to see her anywhere?”

She explained, producing from her breast pocket a photograph —*hmm, this might look like a fantasy world, but photos are common here...*

Except for her hair type, that was straight instead of wavy, the appearance of the cute girl in that photo was similar to a younger version of the woman in front of me.

A younger sister, huh. Then those sisters were just like me and my brother, playing the game together.

“.....”

She wasn't really at fault for trying a desperate measure such as relying on me—a complete newbie—but I'd never seen that girl before.

“Sorry, I'm merely a beginner here. I have just entered this city through the gates over there, so...”

“Oh, is that so... then she's already inside there... still, this is my contact. If you ever happen to see my sister, please contact me! And again, I'm truly sorry for slamming into you.”

The woman then wrote something on a card and handed it over to me.

“It's fine, you don't have to apologize anymore. You can't waste any more time while searching for your sister.”

“Thank you very much... see you then!”

Saying that, she darted away, leaving behind a note in my hands. What she had written there was...

『Member of the Alter Kingdom's Imperial Knights – Vice-Captain Liliana Grandelier』

Hm?

Those weird characters were translated into Japanese inside my head.

Nah, forget about it, there was something even more important there: the continuation of the note had...

【The Quest “Missing Person—Miliane Grandelier // Difficulty: Five” has been generated.】

【For the quest details, please check the Quest Screen.】

“.....”

Aahh, okay.

In other words, that woman, who seemed to be a genuine human, wasn't a player...

“She was an NPC!?”

Once again, I was made to realise just how much the reality within <Infinite Dendrogram> was incomparable to other Full Dive VRMMOs.

Chapter 2

The Bear And The Quest

□ Ray Starling
Royal Capital, Altea
Before the main street's fountain

A short while had passed after my encounter with Liliana, which ended with me receiving my first quest. Now, at long last, I finally arrived at the water fountain in the main street, the meeting location that had been arranged by my brother.

Incidentally, when I took a glance at the details for the quest I had automatically obtained, its objective was to find Liliana's little sister. However, it appeared that its degree of difficulty, ranked "5", usually required a party of individuals leveled 51 and above.

Without a doubt, that was beyond my reach. To begin with, why was it that such a quest was being given out to people who barely started playing the game?

For the time being, let's discuss that with my brother. With that in mind, I had rushed over to this fountain, but...

In front of said fountain...

『Welcome^[1] Little Brother』



...Was written in a sign board, held by a nearly two-meter-tall... “bear costume” that ridiculously stood there.

“...The hell’s that?”

Nope, no way, it couldn’t possible... oh no.

This was the correct meeting place.

There shouldn’t have been many people who would be waiting for their younger brothers.

Since the person didn’t know their brother’s character name, nor they couldn’t possibly use his real name, I could understand why they would write “Little Brother” in the sign board.

And yet...

“Why a costume?”

A lot of courage would be needed to begin a conversation with *that*.

Rather, I didn’t know whether they were NPCs or Players, but there were a lot of kids gathered for that animal costume; they were on top of the bear’s head and lap, dangling from its arm and splendidly hugging it.

At this rate I wasn’t going to make any progress, so I readied myself and decided to talk with the bear.

“Excuse me, could I ask you a question...?”

『Yeah, beary^[2] sure.』

Drop that “beary” stuff.

“Are you Mukudori Shuuichi-san... err, are you my older brother?”

“Indeed. Sup, Reiji.”

...Ah, I had really wanted to be wrong.

“I’m glad we’ve managed to meet here. Then, shall we go?”

The bear... err, my brother, Mukudori Shuuichi, said that and stood up. A moment later, after looking at all the children that had gathered all around him, he used his storage bag, which looked completely different than mine—I mean, it was a *pocket* affixed to the belly part of the costume—and took out sweets from there, distributing them to the kids.

Are you pretending to be the good old Doraemon?[\[3\]](#) Then you should’ve used a cat costume, or at most a tanuki one.

“Yaay♪”

“Bear-san, thank youu!”

Having received the sweets, the children happily cheered while leaving the place.

Consequently, only my brother and I remained here. He then began walking towards some specific place, talking with me in the meantime.

『First of all, let’s introduce ourselves. My name here is ‘Shuu Starling’.』

“And mine is Ray Starling. I guess we chose something pretty similar, huh.”

Since it was fairly simple to use the English translation for our family name, during the creation of a character 80% of the time we would end up with “Starling” as its surname.

『So, what are you going to do? Looks like your <Embryo> hasn’t hatched yet. Want me to show you around the town? While we’re at it, we could arrange some equipment for you. I will lend you some money for that—free of interest, of course.』

“Ahh, that’s right...”

I talked to my brother about the quest I had received earlier.

“Ohoo, a quest from that Liliana? I have never received it.”

“I mean, why would she give such a quest to someone like me, a level o?”

『That’s because of how realistic this world is. A lot of the quests here are generated accidentally. It’s not like there are specific events that will trigger a quest—rather, it’s because of completely incidental events that a quest is created. What happens a lot is people aiming for a quest but never receiving it, or conversely, they end up with a quest they didn’t mean to generate. Well, you made a nice debut in this game... so, were you also able to feel the realism of this world’s inhabitants?』

“Yeah, so much that even now I’m filled with paranoia, wondering whether the person I’m talking to is really my brother, or just some NPC pretending to be him.”

“Of course I’m your beary brother. Please bearive me.”

“Drop the bear tic already.”

I knew the person inside the costume, so whenever I thought about who was saying all those bear puns, an indescribable feeling welled up inside me.

『Hahaha. By the way, that Liliana is a contender for the most, or second most popular person in the Kingdom. There’s even a fan club full of players and tians.』

“There are fan clubs here... oh right, what are ‘tians’?”

『Those individuals who aren’t players. Well, it’s fine to just use the generic ‘NPCs’ for them.』

“Oohh... in other words, there are even NPC members in the club?”

『You see, according to the admins, the tians apparently have ‘the same level of thought and individuality as a real human.’ It’s beary common.』

Really, it was scary just how advanced this game was.

『By the way, about that quest of yours, weren’t there any details about *where* you should be searching for the kid?』

“Nope, there was nothing. That’s why, without any clues, I don’t even know where I am supposed to be looking for her.”

If anything, the only clue I had was this written note.

『Huumm, can I see that card for a moment?』

“Here it is.”

My brother took the paper and, instead of reading its contents, turned it over to show me its other side.

To big sis:

There weren’t any remns in the shop, so I’m going to pick some.

Don’t worry, I’m bringing with me an incense to repel insects.

I hope you look forward to it.

Milia

“What is this?”

『You were in a hurry, right? She wrote her contact information on the back of her little sister’s note and then gave it to you.』

I hadn't noticed that until just now. The note was written in the so-called "parchment", so its backside wasn't visible from the front.

"What are those 'rems'?"

『She's talking about the【Rem Fruit】. It's one of the high-grade delicacies found around this area. Think of it as a freaking delicious fruit.』

"And since she mentioned 'pick,' it means that she went outside to look for those fruits, right?"

Looked like Miliane was a pretty active kid.

『There are two places around here where you can harvest the rem fruits. The first one is the orchard inside this Royal Capital. And just like in the real world, you have to pay a fee to actually harvest the fruits in the orchard. However, to participate there you need to pay 5000 Lirs per basket.』

What, that was the total sum received by the players at the beginning of the game.

Pretty expensive.

『The second location is the <Old Loew's Orchard>, right outside of the south gates.』

"The <Old Loew's Orchard>?"

『For a number of reasons, various insect-type monsters began living there and the orchard was abandoned. Even now, a lot of fruit trees still freely grow there, but the place turned into a literal den of monsters.』

"...That's why there was the mention of an 'insect repellent incense', and so on..."

『Exactly.』

She had way too much energy...

“Damn it, you should’ve gone to the safest one, kid!!”

『It would be hard for a child to have 5000 Lirs with her, you know. Even a single rem, sold at 50 Lirs, is already pretty expensive.』

“But that doesn’t mean she’d...”

『Incidentally, considering that the <Old Loew’s Orchard> is located near a player’s starting point, they sometimes mistake it as a place for newbies and end up getting beaten to death there. Actually, that place is one of those so-called Trap Dungeons, nicknamed, “Rookie Killer.”』

This was simply the worst.

I just realised it now, but when we met, Liliana was probably already heading towards that old orchard. At that time, she’d said, *“then she’s already inside there.”* Most likely, the woman was certain that, since I had just crossed the south gates and didn’t see Miliane, her sister had already entered the orchard.

『At any rate, we should prioritize clearing this quest. I have the feeling that it is the kind that will fail after some time has passed.』

“What?”

『Didn’t I tell you? In this world, not only incidents occur by mere chance, but they are pretty realistic. So... the sense of security that the old generation of games had, where “until the player clears the quest, everything is fine and safe,” doesn’t exist here, at all.』

“But you see—”

『Let me say something as one who has experienced this game since its first day. In the past, there were individuals who *actually died* — like the sage who was once hailed as a “hero”, one of the captains of the kingdom’s knights, and even a king from this country.』

“.....”

『Despite that, the world of Infinite Dendrogram continued moving without any problems. Because it is so real.』

I tried imagining it.

What if the kid in the photo were attacked by a monster and then brutally killed?

Obviously, it was unpleasant just by thinking about it. And when I took Liliana into consideration, I grew even more depressed. I knew that they were NPCs, but still...

“This... would feel pretty bad.”

『Right? So let's complete this quest and lead everyone to a happy ending.』

His face might've been hidden inside that bear costume, but I could feel my brother smiling there.

Thus, as a newbie in the <Infinite Dendrogram> game, I grouped with my brother and, together, we challenged my first quest.

Our objective, the Difficulty 5 Quest: 【Missing Person——Miliane Grandelier】.

Our destination, the Rookie Killer Trap Dungeon, <Old Loew's Orchard>.

Our aim... towards a happy ending.

Quest... start!

Footnotes

1. [↑] 『Welcome 弟』 – The “Welcome” was written just like that, in English.
2. [↑] はいはいクマクマ – He ends his phrases with “kuma”. For now, I think I’m keeping “bear” puns, but if people don’t like it I could just use “kuma kuma” anyway.
3. [↑] ドラちゃん気取りか – He uses “Dora-chan” to talk about Doraemon. It’s an endearing nickname used for the cat with the 4D pocket.

Chapter 3

Status

□ Ray Starling
Royal Capital, Altea
Main Street

『By the way, have you already seen your initial status?』

As we moved towards the <Old Loew's Orchard>, my brother asked about my abilities.

Oh, come to think of it, I didn't even look at them yet.

“Detailed Status... here.”

Then, a new window appeared, displaying my current status.

Ray Starling

Level: 0 (**Level Total:** 0)

Job: None

HP^[11]: 98

MP: 16

SP: 23

STR: 10

END: 12

DEX: 15

AGI: 14

LUC: 16

I didn't know what was the norm around here, but this was, most likely, weak. Guess a level 0 rookie shouldn't be strong, huh.

Speaking of which, it seemed like this game allowed you to take multiple jobs. Because of that, there was the "Level Total" status, a sum of the levels for each one of the player's jobs.

Well, nonetheless... it was also 0 for me.

"And here I am, a level 0, going to a dungeon named『Rookie Killer』."

『Unless you get some sort of job, you'll have to bear with that 0 forever. Wanna take one bear-fore we go there?』

"...Nah, I don't think there's enough time for that. I'll go just like

this.”

If the child from that photo died while we looked for a job, it would be a complete disaster. Right now, we needed to prioritize speed over anything else. Even the conversation with my brother was happening as we rushed over to the orchard.

“Can I ask you a few questions?”

『Beary well.』

“There aren’t any statuses like INT (Intelligence), so which one of them actually decides how strong your magic is? Ah, there is magic in this world, right?”

I remembered how Liliana used healing magic on me.

『It’s calculated using your maximum MP, the level of the magic skill and also the amount of MP used to launch said skill. And yeah, there isn’t an INT status in this game, since you’re going to be using *yours* anyway.』

I see. Of course, if you were to tell me that just by “increasing your intelligence” my magic would get stronger, it would be hard to believe.

“What kind of action consumes SP?”

『Sword skills, martial arts, any technique related to your physical body uses SP. Incidentally, those techniques may consume SP to attack, but their strength is determined by other statuses such as STR and DEX. Also, the way all your statuses grow varies depending on things like your play style, weapon used, job and individual qualities.』

“That’s complicated.”

『Well, ultimately, *que sera, sera*. Your beary self will always end up reflected there.』

...Did he really like doing those bear puns?

『Ah, that's right, I should bear giving you some of my accessories.』

Saying that, my bear brother took out a number of items from his bag and handed them over to me. There were ten vials of the 【Heal Potion Lv2】; a healing item that could, apparently, completely recover the HP of a newbie like me; one 【Lifesaving Brooch】 accessory; and finally, four pieces of the 【Dragon Scale Substitute】.

【Lifesaving Brooch】

While equipped, bestows the 《By a Hair's Breadth》 skill.

Has a 10% chance of breaking when its effect is activated.

※If the user would take damage that exceeds their maximum HP, instead a new damage calculation is done with only the exceeding portion of that damage. This process is repeated as long as the damage to be dealt exceeds the user's maximum HP.

※If the 【Lifesaving Brooch】 breaks while equipped, for a period of 24 hours the user will not be able to equip another 【Lifesaving Brooch】.

《By a hair's breadth》: Damage that would have otherwise killed the user is nullified only once.

【Dragon Scale Substitute】

If the user would be dealt damage, that damage is instead reduced to 10% of its original value.

Breaks after its effect is triggered.

『There are level and status restrictions bear-hind the equipment in

this game. That's why you should boost yourself with the accessories that are now in your pawsession, since they don't have any level restrictions.]

As the number of equipment slots for accessories was five, I could perfectly use all of them.

"Thanks, bro... also, on that subject, what are the penalties for dying here?"

Penalties for dying.

It was a feature that many online games had.

Simply put, there was some kind of penalty for a character that died in those games; losing levels or spending a certain period of time with a handicap applied to their status, for example. This would result in players trying to avoid dying, so this game should have had some sort of punishment for them too.

That's why I waited for my brother's response, but...

『You won't be able to login for 24 hours.】

It was beyond any expectations I ever had.

"...What did you say?"

『When you die here, you're blocked from entering <Infinite Dendrogram> for 24 hours in the real world, or 72 hours in this world.】

Are they insane?

Okay, this might be just a game, but to think that there was a death penalty that wouldn't let you play...

『And the most terrible point of that punishment isn't that you can't play the game. It's the fact that, during your penalty period, the world of <Infinite Dendrogram> will have normally progressed for three

entire days. Let's say there's an ongoing quest like the one you've generated. It will mean that such a quest is going to be neglected for seventy-two hours. For a realistic world like this one, that's something pretty scary.』

If my bear brother and I were to disappear for three days, then this quest we had undertaken would... I didn't even need to say how it would end.

“Let's try not to die. Although I don't know how helpful a level o like me would be.”

I mean, would I even be of any use?

『By the way, like I've said bear-fore, the <Old Loew's Orchard> is a Trap Dungeon known as the “Rookie Killer.” Those helpless bear-gingers, who knew nothing about it when playing the game for the first time, would go, “Yaay, time to explore this nearby place,” and enter the dungeon—only to immediately get mauled to death and experience the 24-hour login ban.』

That's a trauma making machine if I'd ever seen one.

『Still, this is weird. Why the “Difficulty: 5” for this quest? The monsters in that dungeon should only be around level 25... that “5” is too high.』

While listening to my brother's murmurs, we finally went through the southern gates of Altea.



After leaving the gates and running for about 1X minutes, we found a certain facility. It was surrounded by a metal fence and, at its entrance, there was a tattered signboard, with 『Welcome to <Loew's Orchard>』 written on it.

However, the facility had already been abandoned; plants grew wildly all over the place and the sign's colors had lost their vividness.

『Well then, at last, we're venturing in there, but...』

My big brother paused in front of the entrance to the <Old Loew's Orchard>, the place that had turned into a den of insect monsters. Immediately after, a brand new window appeared in my field of view.

【Shuu Starling has invited you to join his party.】

【Accept the request? YES/NO】

『It will bear easier for me to protect you if I can always see your status. However, since there's a level difference between us, we can't distribute the experience points equally, so your share will be directly proportional to your contribution to the fights.』

“You know, one way or another, I don't have any use for EXP right now.”

As it was often the case in MMORPGs, when a lone player battled and defeated a monster, all its EXP would go to the player; on the other hand, it was another case when fighting in a party.

In this game, there were two different methods for distributing experience points.

The first was the equal distribution. Available when the individuals forming a party were in the same level zone, it divided the monster's total experience evenly between all members.

The second one was the proportional distribution. It was a method that altered the amount of EXP received by the party member proportionally to their active efforts during the battle. In the <Infinite Dendrogram> game, “active efforts” included not only the amount of damage dealt, but also supporting actions such as healing.

Yet, for the level 0 (jobless) me, experience points were irrelevant.

What was important now was to successfully complete the quest and save those sisters. Getting a job and leveling up could wait until after that.

“And... YES.”

I then pressed the “YES” button on the window.

A second later, the party/simplified status screen opened, and there I could see that my brother’s name had been added. Since the free space on that screen allowed four more names to be included, it seemed like, in this game, six was the maximum number of members in a party.

Alright, my brother’s status was currently displayed together with his name. Hmm, it was displayed there, but...

“What... is this?”

Shuu Starling

Job: ■

Level: ■ (**Level Total:** ■)

HP: ■

MP: ■

SP: ■

Albeit it was the simplified status, every single entry displayed there had been painted over in black.

『Ahh, that’s one of the beary effects of this bear costume. If there’s a difference in level between us, it makes my status invisible to both allies and enemies alike.』

The hell’s that effect?

It would obviously make it harder to provide support magic... well, it wasn’t like I could’ve done that anyway.

Come to think of it...

“Big bro... after hearing about the quest details I forgot to ask you this, but why are you wearing a bear costume?”

As I threw that question, with somewhat ease my brother used the costume’s claws to scratch its cheek.

『This is a beary sad tale, you’ll bear moved to tears.』

“Just answer it already, we’re busy here you know.”

『*My little brother’s gaze is so cold...*』 he grumbled, and bit by bit started talking.

『Err, there’s the Character Creation thing right?』

“Yeah.”

『Since it would be such a pain to create it from scratch, I tried using myself as the base model.』

“And I did the same.”

『At that moment, I kinda committed a little mistake...』

“A mistake...? What did you do?”

『I carelessly confirmed the avatar without doing any customization on it.』

“...Well shit.”

『Beaar whyy ...』

In short, the figure of the person inside the costume was 100% my brother. There was a limit to risking things^[2] while playing online games, and using something like your real face was completely out of question.

Yet, that was exactly my brother's case now. He had no other option but to wear that costume.

『By the way, I chose this country because in the images that were shown of its capital, I could see a shop that sold costumes...』

“Ahh, no wonder you didn't go to Driphe or Grand Valois, even though you fancied that kind of stuff.”

『Yeah, I had to sacrifice something... bear-sides, the first costume I bought cost me 4980 Lirs.』

“Isn't that, like, nearly all of your initial money?”

Just how did he manage to live here since the very launch of the game?

『Moreover, it was just a piece of joke equipment that had no defensive effect whatsoever. Also, considering I was one of the pioneers in the game, we had zero information about anything. Maan, the struggle from such a desperate start to my current costume was an unbearable path, filled with suffering.』

“So, what are the effects of the one you're using?”

『They are...』

[X-Treme Costume Series, Hind Bear^[31]]

Ancient Legendary Armor

Defense Bonus +903 (Bear-san^[4])

Equipment Skills

『Disguise』: Status concealment effect. If the difference between the user's and the target's Level Totals is 100 or more, the user's status is completely hidden from the other's sight.

『Air-Conditioning Organs』: Four seasons air-conditioning organs. Provides a comfortable temperature anytime, anywhere.

『Power Assist』: Supports the user's movements with motorized muscles. STR+903

『Bulletproof Design』: Also with a crossfire-proof design. User takes 903 less damage from long-distance physical attacks.

『Stab-proof Design』: For those special days when assassins just won't leave you alone^[51]. User takes 903 less damage from short-distance physical attacks.

『All-purpose Bear Paw^[61]』: It is a mystery how it can be used to grab and manipulate things with dexterity. Additional effects: Damage UP against Fish and Insect monsters.

『?????』 : ■

...Whoa, this was abnormally strong for a mere joke equipment.

“What’s with that “+903” bonus? I may not know anything about the status limit for this game, but isn’t that pretty high? Or rather, what’s even your level, Bear Brother?”

For the current me, I couldn’t see my brother’s status at all, so his Level Total should’ve been above 100...

『It-is-a-bear-se-cret.』

Maan, he's annoying.

『Well, let's beary the comedy stuff now and go save the little girl.』

“...90% of the ‘comedy’ was your fault, bear brother. Still, yeah, let’s go.”

We then rushed into the <Old Loew’s Orchard>.

Inside, the supposed ground pathways were now overgrown with rank weeds, and the guiding signboards, that pointed to the regular routes, were nearly completely broken.

And one of those boards read 『Rem Fruit Field → 5XX metars』.

“Should I think of it as being ‘5XX *meters*’?”

『Pretty easy to understand, right? Also, did you notice it?』

“...Is it those sounds that have been going on for some time? Yeah.”

From the direction pointed by the guiding board, I could hear non-human voices and clashing sounds being released. Although I couldn’t see what was happening there because of all the vegetation, I was sure that Liliana—who had entered this dungeon earlier—was in the middle of a battle.

Then, I finally realized it.

I could only hear sounds of combat coming from the Rem Fruit Field. All the other locations were mostly silent.

“So, are we the only players here?”

『Ahh, man, there are just too many people with the trauma of dying in this dungeon. To make things worse, for a place of this level range, the items dropped and money yielded here aren’t that good. Moreover, not only do the insects attack in swarms, but many of them

can also poison and paralyze you, so it is indispensable to bring something to counter abnormal status effects.]

Apparently, this was a “deserted farming zone.”

『Well, thanks to that, it will be easier for me to fight——Baldr, activate your 2nd form.』

『Ready』

When my brother muttered some words, an unfamiliar mechanical voice answered. Then, light shone—through the costume—from the back of his left hand and, suddenly, something appeared.

Immediately after, that bizarre something was added to my brother’s bear-y silhouette.

Multiple gun barrels arranged in a circular manner.

A high-speed loading mechanism moved by a motor.

A belt-shaped loading tube.

And finally, a giant magazine in the shape of a drum can.

It was a heavy weapon commonly used by aircraft, the so-called “gatling gun.”

“...Wasn’t this game supposed to be in a fantasy setting?”

Footnotes

1. [↑] Specifically, the complete translation for the status is: HP (Stamina), MP (Magical Power/Points), SP (Skill Power/Points), STR (Physical Strength), END (Endurance), DEX (Dexterity), AGI (Agility) and LUC (Luck).
2. [↑] 危険牌 – Literally, Dangerous Tile, a term from Mahjong for a tile that is dangerous to discard.
3. [↑] Q極着ぐるみシリーズ はいんどべあ – Literally, it would be “Q-Max Costume Series, Hind Bear”, but there’s a pun with the first part of the item’s name: “Q極” can be read as “Kyuukyoku” (究極) or “Extreme/Ultimate”, since ‘Q’ sounds like ‘Kyuu’ when spoken.
4. [↑] Bear-san/Kuma-san – The reason for all the 903 bonuses. Each number can be read in Japanese as follows: 9 [Ku] o [Ma(ru)] 3 [San].
5. [↑] 刺客が多い日も安心 – Basically, the second part, “多い日も安心” is often seen in pad commercials (yeah), but it roughly means “giving you peace of mind for many days” so people also use it for other stuff where you prepare yourself for something.
6. [↑] 熊手 – This word means “rake”, but if you took it kanji by kanji, it’s literally “bear hand”. I don’t know if I should keep it just as “Rake” or “Bear Rake” or even “Bear/Bare Hands”.

Chapter 4

The Safety And The Danger Zones

□ Ray Starling
<Old Loew's Orchard>

When I looked at my big brother's <Embryo>—a Type Arms, I think—I couldn't help but wonder aloud. I imagined that a Type Arms would've been more like a magic sword or spear, for example. But a gatling gun...

“How does a gatling gun even make sense in a fantasy world?”

“Hey, since this is a world where a country of machines like Driphe exists, it shouldn't bear weird for my <Embryo> to exist too.”

My bear brother laughed, all the while supporting the drum magazine on his shoulder and holding the gun barrel under his right arm.

Feeling somewhat amazed, as I gazed at such a surreal appearance...

『KIKIKI.....』

『CHIKI.....CHIKI.....』

Bee and ant monsters had apparently realized our presence and gathered before us.

『Alright, let's maul through them until we reach the Rem Field.』

Saying that, my bear brother readied his gatling gun and... opened fire.

『YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!』

In an instant, following a series of thunderous roars, the insect monsters were smashed into pieces, their body fluids scattering all around.

With every turn of the barrel, the fired bullets would create even more corpses; and as soon as those lifeless bodies hit the ground, following a common game-like feature, they would turn into light and disappear.

It was a completely one-sided massacre.

My bear brother's strafing fire was much faster than the monsters' appearance rate. In a little less than a minute, hundreds—no, *thousands* of empty cartridges had been expelled by the machine gun.

Normally, it would be impossible to carry and fire something like that, but... from the description he had shown me, that bear costume worked almost like a powered suit. At the very least, it gave a bonus of over 900 points in STR, so I guess that having about 90 times my own strength would make it possible for him. And yet, firing that while walking seemed ridiculous.

Since he had been firing at such a high rate without running out of ammo, some sort of mysterious power must have been at work there, considering the gun was my brother's <Embryo>.

Even then, the way he held the gatling gun and fired was just like a certain scene from a classic movie from the past. Yeah, it was a masterpiece, the second installment to an android-themed series, where its actor would later become the governor of a state.

Hmm, well, the one doing that scene right now wasn't a massive bodybuilder though. It was a person in a bear costume, something that would've turned that great movie into a C grade garbage.

“Still, it feels like I won't be of any use here...”

It wasn't a mere problem of finding the correct moment to attack or not. If I were to carelessly step forward, I would most likely become

Swiss cheese in an instant. Obviously, even after all those monsters got utterly annihilated, I didn't receive a single point of EXP.

『Oh, you can leave the dropped items there, just keep following closely bear-hind me.』

Although their corpses disappeared, items had still popped up at the moment of their defeat.

Incidentally, the 『Disassembling』 skill existed in this game. It apparently extended the time it would normally take for a corpse to disappear, allowing its user to disassemble said body; as a result, many more items could be obtained.

“Got it... hmm, come to think of it, this situation here...”

It was a situation that often occurred in games: at the beginning, a low level player character progressed with the aid of a high level character. The strong aiding character was really helpful, but generally, that character would die at the end of the early stages, signaling the closure for the game's first part.

“...Is just like the ‘URRRAAHH’^[1] thing. Man, that sure takes me back.”

『...No no no, wouldn't that mean I'm just going to die later then?』

He replied in a complicated tone of voice.

Albeit it was impossible to distinguish whether we were simply battling, doing a job or even having a comedic exchange, we continued in that mixed manner and, finally, covered the 5XX metars distance, reaching the Rem Fruit Field.



“Who's there!? Y-You are...!”

Surely enough, in the rem field, Liliana was engaged in battle against the insect monsters. To protect her little sister, the woman stood in

front of the young girl and took on a nearly infinite number of enemies.

“Alright, we weren’t late!”

『The ursome cavalry (without a horse) is here!』

As I rejoiced after realizing that I had arrived on time, the bear brother by my side continued to magnificently punch lead through the insects. Then, at an astounding rate, the encirclement of monsters began decreasing.

...That’s fine and all, but please don’t hit either of the sisters by mistake, okay?

While I worried about the two, the enemies surrounding them were quickly eliminated. My brother was already pretty strong, but I had the impression that the gatling gun was the perfect kind of weapon for our current situation, when fighting against hordes of enemies at the same time; even in the history of Japan, for the Nagaoka domain during the Boshin War, the gatling gun seemingly played a very active role.

Anyway, we finally managed to safely arrive at their side.

“Are you okay?”

This time, I said the same words as Liliana when we met for the first time.

“You’re that person from before... why are you here?”

She glared at me, a look of surprised on her face.

Hm? That reaction, it was as if she had noticed me just now.

Then... did it mean that her previous words, “*Y-You are,*” were actually directed at... my brother?

“And even you, too... really, why...?”

『Bear-cause I came here to help. When my younger brother said, "There's no way I can leave her alone! No matter what happens, I'm going to save her!" I also decided to bear-stow my aid.』

Wait a moment, I didn't say that you know!? I have absolutely no memory of spouting such incredibly embarrassing lines!!

“Younger brother... then...”

Muttered Liliana, apparently realizing something.

What was up with the atmosphere here? By any chance, were my brother and that woman acquaintances? As I asked myself those questions, Liliana turned towards me and deeply bowed.

“Thank you very much. If you two had not come for us, I wouldn't have been able to protect my sister... my Milia.”

“O-Oh no, please. I just watched everything from behind my brother...”

“Even so, please let me express my gratitude. Despite the fact that I had caused so much trouble for you in the past, you went out of your way to come with reinforcements to my aid... I will never forget this favor.”

Upon hearing her words, more than just being embarrassed, I actually felt guilty. After all, other than receiving the quest, I hadn't done anything at all; I simply leeched on to the safety zone that was on my brother's back. Because of that, without being able to look at her in the eyes, I averted my gaze and noticed, there, the woman's sister, Miliane.

She looked exactly like in the photo—or rather, that beautiful little girl looked even cuter in person.

『A loli? Hey, are you a pedobear^[2] or something?』

Of course not.

“Sniff, Hic...”

Miliane had been crying.

Of course, that was completely natural. Her very life had been at risk while she was surrounded by that many insect monsters. Yet, she seemed to be holding herself together as there was still a basket in her hands, its interior filled with about five fruits—most probably, the rumored rem fruits.

“So, at any rate, let’s get out of here. It will be bad if more of those monsters gather around us.”

“Understood.”

At that moment, a change occurred on my Menu screen.

【NPCs have been added to the party.】

【Liliana Grandelier has joined your party.】

【Miliane Grandelier has joined your party.】

Ahh, so it meant that NPCs could also enter in a party.

Let me see their statuses... hmm, Miliane was weaker than me.

However, Liliana’s status was simply amazing.

Liliana Grandelier

Job: Paladin

Level: 60 (**Level Total:** 210)

HP: 5450

MP: 1684

SP: 1430

Her Level Total of 210 was... way too high.

That was a Vice-Captain of the royal knights for you. Well, since she was the #2 knight among all others in the kingdom, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Liliana was that strong.

『.....』

And wait, right now I noticed that, for some reason, my bear brother had been showing a serious look on his face (although I couldn't see it directly, as we knew each other for so many years I was able to tell it just by observing his current mood).

『Ray, hasn't the quest been completed yet?』

“Ah, no. I didn't see any changes in particular.”

『I see.』

With his gatling gun readied, the bear kept guard over our surroundings. His aspect seemed far more serious than a while ago, when he fearlessly confronted the insects.

“Big bro...?”

『Ray, this is about the quests' degree of difficulty in this world. For

every quest, the Managing AI in charge of them analyzes not only the environmental information of the area, but also the background of the individuals related to the respective quest. Then, with all of that information, a degree of difficulty is finally calculated.』

“Eh?”

Analyzing environmental information and personal backgrounds? Surely, doing that one-by-one, for each quest, was something possible for a Managing AI, but what was the connection between that and our current situation...

『So, I assumed that the reason for such a high difficulty level was because this was a Time Limit Quest with a short timer.』

He voiced his thoughts bit by bit.

『Since I was here *and* specialized in fighting against multiple enemies, I believed it explained how easily we managed to walk through everything and reach this place. However...』

My brother's line of sight moved towards a certain point in the ground.

『Liliana joined us in the middle of the quest. In other words, the real deal was supposed to begin *after* we've joined our forces with her. “This is a Difficulty: 5 quest because you are together with the Level Total 210 Liliana,” it seems.』

Immediately following his words, the portion of the ground he had been observing exploded, and from it *something* massively huge and long appeared.

『GYULUUUUUUUUAAAAAAA!!!』

With about 30 meters in length, it was a giant centipede.

『Tch!』

Despite that, differently from normal centipedes, its skin was

covered in scales like a reptile, and easily repelled the bullets my brother had been firing since the monster's sudden appearance. In addition, protruding from its face in all four directions were large mandibles, similar to ones seen on stag beetles.

I might've been a newbie but I knew it instantly.

That monster was... strong.

“A 【Demi-Dragwurm^[3]】...!”

Liliana's shocked words reached my ears.

『GIIIEEEEAAAAAAA!!』

Following that, the ground exploded again and yet another one of those 【Demi-Dragwurm】 monsters appeared.

『A monster of the Demi-Dragon class, huh... now I get it. If we're having to fight against several of those enemies in order to protect this kid, then even with Liliana's aid, I can agree to this quest's difficulty level. But you know...!!』

While I had been left speechless at the intimidating air coming from those two monsters, my brother was the complete opposite; rather, it felt as if all his worries had already been extinguished when his cheerful voice came out.

『This isn't nearly enough for you to fight against me!』

And then, with both arms raised, he...

『Time to strike and crush everything! Baldr! 4th form, activa---』

『GIIIEEEAAALEAAAAAAA!!!』

『GYULUUUUUUUUAAAAAAA!!!』

『GYUIIILUUUUAAAAAAA!!!』

『GYULUUUUUUUULOAAAAAAA!!!』

Immediately, appearing from the ground and surrounding him from all four directions were the 【Demi-Dragwurms】 “numbers three through six^[4]”, that proceeded to capture my brother in their massive mandibles and then disappeared underground.

“…………What?”

“Ngh!”

First, there was I, who managed to process the visual information of such a quick incident, and yet couldn’t *comprehend* what had just happened. Then, there was Liliana, who bit her lips over that completely unexpected situation.

Although I verified the simplified status of the party… the entry for my brother was still covered in black, so I couldn’t confirm whether he was alive or dead.

“Hey, big bro, I know it was my fault for triggering that flag… but for that matter you were taken out just too early, man.”

As we were left without my brother, the remaining two 【Demi-Dragwurms】 drew near to us. In an instant, I had been thrown out from a safety zone—my brother’s back—to a danger zone.

“Whoa…”

Until now, the biggest animal I had ever seen up close had been an elephant. However, those giant monsters were way bigger than elephants; and currently, they were closing in, directing a dry cold hostility towards me.

To tell the truth, even though I knew that I was in a game, my legs still trembled from fear.

“…I have something to ask of you.”

Liliana spoke to the frightened me.

“W-What is it?”

“I will hold one of them back—or, if I find the opportunity, the both of them. So please, in the meantime, could you take my sister somewhere safe?”

“B-But then...”

There were two enemies. No matter how strong Liliana was, alone she wouldn't...

...No, I was getting ahead of myself. A level 0 like me wouldn't even be able to assist her. Rather, I would just become a hindrance to her if I were to stay here.

“...Got it.”

Leading Miliane by her hand, I started running.

Behind us, the battle between Liliana and the 【Demi-Dragwurms】 had already begun.

Footnotes

1. [↑] ぬわーーっ!! – In case you didn't notice, that entire part is a reference to Dragon Quest V. I used "URRRAAHH" since it was the official translation for that scream. The fantranslation used "Arrrgggghhhhh" though.
2. [↑] ロリ? ロリコンクマ? – Shuuichi actually says "Loli? Lolicon-kuma?" so to keep some kind of pun I translated it differently.
3. [↑] 亜竜甲蟲(デミドラグワーム) – "Aryuu Kabutomushi". 亜 (demi) 竜 (dragon) 甲蟲 (usually rhinoceros beetle, but here is 'carapace/shelled worm'). As indicated by the furigana (デミドラグ ワーム), it can be read as "Demi-Dragwurm". It should be pointed out that the kanji used in the "Kabutomushi" part (蟲, Mushi) is the complete form, instead of the simplified kanji that is commonly used (虫, Mushi). Still, they can both mean insect and worm, for example.
4. [↑] Or "#3 through #6", whichever you all find better.

Chapter 5

Nemesis

□ Ray Starling
<Old Loew's Orchard>

Currently, in the path we previously used to arrive at the Rem Fruit Field—where my brother had swept any and all insects in his way with the gatling gun—I couldn't see a single trace of monsters. If it was now, we could run and cover in one go the distance of 5XX metars until the entrance of the dungeon.

Yet, this was going to be hard.

Now that I had started running at full speed for the first time, I understood that this game also had the notion of “fatigue”. And not only that, but probably affected by my present situation, my legs were shaking. Thoroughly enough, on my status screen the abnormal status **【Fear】** was being displayed.

Nonetheless, I pressed on, making it my priority to at least never let go of Miliane's hand.

“Gasp, ngh...!”

She also seemed to have been over-exerting herself, but still rushed with all her might. All the while, her face only expressed one emotion: fear. And scared as we were, our legs didn't stop running.

“By the way...”

Trying to take the mind off our current circumstances, even if just a little, I called out to Miliane. Okay, whether it was to distract my mind or hers, I honestly didn't know it myself.

“Miliane... Milia-chan, why did you come to a place like this just to pick 【Rem Fruits】?”

I wanted to both ask a simple question and also ease our minds with it.

“T-Today is... my big sis’ birthday... she, really loves rem cake, so I wanted to bake one for her...”

“Ohh, I see...”

“But, the shop did not have any left, so I got worried. But then, the glasses big bro^[1] there said 『If you have this incense, you will be able to pick the fruits in the <Orchard> outside of town』...”

It was that four-eyes’ fault.

I had no idea what the hell he was thinking when he told the little girl that, but I really want to punch the light’s out of someone who would throw a kid into such a dangerous place.

“I collected some rem and then my big sis came to pick me up, but then the effect of the incense ended...”

As we talked, we covered half of the total distance. Now we just needed to complete the other half. At this rate, we would really manage to escape.

『.....uluuuu』

Suddenly, a growl accompanied by an earth tremor came from behind us.

“!”

It was a reaction in the blink of a moment.

I held Miliane in my arms and jumped to the side.

The next moment, a 【Demi-Dragwurm】 that sprung forth from

underground passed through the space we had been in just a second ago, its giant mandibles making gnawing noises.

“No way...!”

Although I turned to look what was behind me, I could still hear the sounds of battle in the distance.

Liliana was still in combat.

Was that one of the two that were fighting her? Did it escape from the battle and come chasing after us?

Or was it part of the group that took my brother away into the ground?

...There was even the possibility that many more dragwurms were out there, but I didn't want to strain my mind with that.

Still, the real problem here was that, no matter which alternative was correct, I had no means of going against that monster.

Praying, I tried looking at my status screen; however, I was still a level 0 and the <Embryo> on my left hand hadn't hatched yet. Moreover, even if it had hatched, I hardly believed that a brand new <Embryo> would be able to rival an enemy whose skin couldn't be pierced by my brother's own <Embryo>, a gatling gun.

As my heart pounded with fear and uneasiness, cold sweat flowed down my forehead and back. Everything felt so realistic I thought I was going to die from that alone.

『GYULUUUUUUUUUEAAAAA!!』

Exposing its long body from the ground, the 【Demi-Dragwurm】 roared. It wasn't something the monster had used to “intimidate a foe”. Rather, it was just the roaring laughter of the triumphant, stronger side.

“...So it's over, huh.”

<Old Loew's Orchard>, the 『Rookie Killer』. Looks like I'll also be tragically meeting my first 『Death』 here.

Nevertheless...

“Uhgh, waaaahhh...”

Currently, while still in my arms, Miliane was crying.

She was an NPC... a tian. And differently from us players, she couldn't come back after dying. From what my brother told me, if even someone as important as a king had died *and* stayed dead, I didn't think that this girl would be any different. Here, in this world of <Infinite Dendrogram>, she would obviously die.

“...Like I said, this would feel pretty bad.”

I removed the 【Lifesaving Brooch】 from the equipment field and fastened it on Miliane's clothes.

“Milia-chan. Could you run from here alone until you return to the entrance?”

“...Eh?”

The young girl looked up at me with unease in her eyes.

“You see, I just have to deliver a hard beating to that shitty centipede. It won't take long.”

As soon as I said those words, the monster charged at us with its massive build.

I tossed Miliane away—and as if hit by a truck, my body was launched in the air.

“Gaah, haah...”

It was a dreadful impact, way more violent than that time in the city, when I had collided with Liliana.

However, I was still alive.

I had taken 93 damage, and now had 5 HP left.

On the Equipment field that was still open, I could see that one of the four equipped 【Dragon Scale Substitutes】 broke down and disappeared. Since the effect of that 【Dragon Scale】 had decreased the damage of the monster's charge by 90%, I managed to survive.

Then, I forced my numbed body to move and drank one of the 【Heal Potion Lv2】 from the Items field. My HP recovered completely and my body could freely move again.

When I shifted my line of sight, Miliane was still there.

“Go! I will do something about this monster!”

That was a lie, and a big one.

Of course I couldn't do anything. But I would manage to buy some time for her to safely escape.

When she heard me, the little girl stood up and dashed towards the entrance. I was sure that if she reached the entrance and left the dungeon, there would be players and NPCs outside that could help her.

Then that's fine, as soon as that thought crossed my mind, I was hit again and hurled away.

For the second time, I barely escaped death with a now broken 【Dragon Scale】 , and again for the second time I fully recovered by using another 【Potion】.

“Hah! You'll have to do it three more times for me to get the penalty for dying, you shitty centipede!”

As it attacked for the third time, I managed to avoid the charge. Even with a beginner's status, if you timed your movements with perfection, it wasn't impossible to dodge its strike.

In spite of that,

“!?”

The worm's tail end moved around and caught me, sending my body flying.

With barely any changes from the other instances, the damage brought my HP again to the dead zone and another **【Dragon Scale】** was broken.

“Damn... it.”

Only one scale left, I guess.

Miliane still hadn't reached the entrance of the dungeon. At the very least, I had to buy time for her until she managed to escape.

When I thought as such,

『GYUUUUEAAAA!!』

The monster's aim changed.

Twisting around its gigantic body, the **【Demi-Dragwurm】** set its sight in the young girl's direction.

“Hey, where are you looking at, you damned...“

It stubbornly disregarded me and—just like that, charged towards Miliane.

“STOP RIGHT THEEEEEEEERE!!!!!!”

Although I ran at full speed, it wasn't enough to keep up with the worm, and its enormous body hit the girl.

—As if it were just a lone leaf blown by the wind, her small figure floated in the air.

Even the basket that she had been holding with great care escaped her hands, dropping to the ground.

“AAAAAAAHHHHH!!”

Without any hesitation, I leapt in and caught her falling body. The moment I did so, my own body received the brunt of her fall, with an intense shock running through me and breaking the last 【Dragon Scale】.

But that wasn't a problem right now.

While afraid of checking her condition, I looked at Miliane's face. My heart complained in pain—a pain different than the physical one you would usually feel with your body.

“.....”

She had lost consciousness, and, yet, was completely unharmed. Instead, the 【Lifesaving Brooch】 I had given her was broken. Apparently, even though it was Miliane wearing it, the brooch's effect had safely activated.

However, the item had already been destroyed. Not only that, but my fourth and last 【Dragon Scale】 had suffered the same fate.

We now possessed no means of enduring any more strikes from the 【Demi-Dragwurm】.

Liliana was still in the middle of combat.

Absolutely nothing could be done about our situation anymore.

『GYUUUUAAAAAAA!!』

Letting out incomprehensible “words” right before us, while the monster had lost its temper over such a resilient prey, it seemed to be trembling in joy now that it was finally able to deliver the final blow.

Wanting to at least offer some resistance, as minimal as it was, I

tried readying the knife that was part of my initial equipment. As soon as I removed it from its sheath, though, the knife blade fell apart. Seemed like it was broken without even seeing use, after the repeated strikes I had received.

The possibilities of Miliane and I surviving were already... zero.

“.....”

I looked at the unconscious girl in my arms.

Her weight, her temperature, her breathing, her displayed emotions, everything felt no different from the real world.

As a living being—as an incredibly realistic living being—this girl existed here.

And following the same concept of death in the real world, that life would soon be extinguished.

“...DAMN IT AALL!”

I wasn’t about to give up now.

To me, a player, this was just a game world. There was no problem if I died.

But even though I *understood*

this was a game, just the thought of this girl permanently disappearing from this world was enough to leave a bad taste in my mouth.

Frustrated, I clenched my fist with everything I had. Buried on the back of that hand was the egg-like <Embryo>, still in its oth form.

“Hey...”

I...

“If an <Embryo> can bring the player... if *you*, can bring *me*... an infinite number of possibilities...”

...wish of you.

“Give me, the possibility...”

Right now, in front of the monster that has yet to deliver the coup de grace while raising its neck, I wish of you.

“Give me, the possibility of a happy ending, the possibility that could save this child, please...!”

To the embodiment of a world of possibilities, to the so-called “Infinite Dendrogram” that was in my left hand, I wished from the bottom of my heart.

“Awaken right now... and even if it’s just 1%, give me that possibilityyyyyy!!”

The 【Demi-Dragwurm】began its last charge...

『Oh, my Master is unexpectedly overbearing^[2]. Still, I was born from that side of you. I do not dislike it.』

In an instant, the lethal attack was stopped by *someone*.

“...Ah?”

Similarly to when my brother had disappeared underground, I wasn’t able to grasp what was happening in front of me.

The tragedy that was supposed to have occurred right before my eyes, didn’t; I simply couldn’t comprehend the impossible miracle that had just happened. The <Embryo> had disappeared from the back of my left hand, and in its place a crest had been left behind. Moreover, the 【Demi-Dragwurm】that should have killed us was repelled by a wall of light and now had its body launched backwards. Finally, standing in the space between the monster and us was an unknown girl.

While a jet-black hair that fluttered in the wind and a skin that gleamed like white porcelain.

Her Gothic Lolita skirt, made of a black fabric and adorned with white frills, swayed around with refinement as she turned to look at me. Right there, I saw her eyes.

A dead of night, black color, coupled with the white of a starry sky.

“Good morning.”

Was the very first thing she said after opening her mouth.

“.....”

“Hmpf, looking pretty perplexed there. Good grief, you are really unbelievable. Since you^[3] had told me to awaken, I have been forced to do so.”

The mysterious tone of voice she had a while ago was now gone. However, from her words, I could formulate a guess about what had possibly occurred.

“You... you are my...”

My <Embryo>...?

“Naturally. Okay then, Master? That shitty centipede is still alive and well. Let us liven up and celebrate my birthday. Shall we deliver a coup de grace in grand style?”

“But how a—ngh!?”

Before I could even finish my question, the girl *melted*.

Losing her humanoid shape, she became a clump of black sparkling light and then coiled around my right arm, transforming into something else there.

It was a black longsword. Even though it had an ominous, organic appearance, it still looked somewhat beautiful.

『You'll be handling the timing of the attack. When that shitty centipede comes charging at us, just swing me down. If you fail, we're all dead, got it?』

『*I gave you the possibility, the rest is now up to you.*』.....was what I felt she had told me.

“...Got it.”

Before she even asked me, I had already been aware of what I was supposed to do.

As if it was full of resentment towards us, the 【Demi-Dragwurm】 attacked with a speed it had never shown before. It moved in a straight line so I could still see its charge, but the monster was so fast it would be impossible for me to avoid the hit.

Despite that, there was enough time to swing my sword.

『Master almost died thrice and I absorbed one attack, so I'll be taking the entire force^[4] of your four strikes, you bastard...』

When the monster's giant mandibles were on the brink of touching us,

『——”And then return everything two-fold!”』

I swung down the black longsword.

『———《Vengeance is Mine^[5]》』

The moment it hit its target, there was an impact.

And a second later, an instant of silence.

Immediately following, as though it had been smashed by a monster several times bigger than it, the worm's entire body—starting from its

head—was pulverized into small fragments.

Man, today, just how many times did I see things that felt incredibly hard to comprehend? While questioning myself, I looked at what was right in front of my eyes.

Little by little, the 【Demi-Dragwurm's】 crushed, massive body turned into light and began disappearing, only leaving behind its dropped item.

Behind me, Miliane was still unconscious. And by my side, having returned from her black longsword form, was the other girl.

“That was a great success. Well done, Master. You managed to grasp with your own hands the possibility you wished for.”

“So you’re really my <Embryo>?”

The moment I asked that question, she lightly raised her frilled skirt and, at the same time, forced a respectful bow.

“I am Nemesis. Nemesis the TYPE: Maiden-with-Arms <Embryo>. Also, I am what was born from your mind, body and soul.”

As she introduced herself like that, the girl—Nemesis—revealed a broad smile.

“Please continue treating me well in the future, okay, Master?”

Footnotes

1. [↑] It's obviously not her "brother", she's just referring to the man as "glasses onii-san".
2. [↑] 暑苦しい – "Atsukurushii" was the word used. By itself, it means "uncomfortably hot", or something you would feel while wearing winter clothes in the middle of summer, for example. But in this case (most probably), the meaning goes for that sane feeling of discomfort you feel when now dealing with an "Atsukurushii" person. I don't know if "overly passionate" would work and I'm still not sure about "overbearing".
3. [↑] 御主 – Here she refers to him as "Onushi", a very old way of saying "You". Literally, it means "master", but has a connotation that the one speaking is equal or superior to the other being addressed. Should I use the archaic these archaic versions for her speech? "thy/thou/thee etc"? Also, she sometimes changes the way she speaks with him later in the chapter, sounding more active/pumped up (and dropping the "Onushi").
4. [↑] 四度の全靈攻撃 – I interpreted this like like this: the whole "soul" (全靈) of each of the four (四度) attacks (攻撃). But I'm not 100% sure about it.
5. [↑] 復讐するは我にあり – The furigana (ヴェンジエンス・イズ・マイン) matched it perfectly too, "Vengeance is Mine". Also a movie title.

Chapter 6

Achievement

□ Ray Starling
Outside of the <Old Loew's Orchard>

After defeating the 【Demi-Dragwurm】 thanks to Nemesis, I retrieved the 【Demi-Dragwurm's Treasure Coffer】 that had dropped and, while carrying Miliane on my back, we escaped the <Old Loew's Orchard>.

The thought of going back and providing backup for Liliana didn't even cross my mind. Why? Because on the window that displayed the status for all party members, I could see that she was still alive and well; moreover, there was no way that another miracle, like the one from before, would happen twice, thrice, and so on.

I had a hunch that, if I were to get cocky here, I would certainly mess everything up.

“Retreating was the right choice. If it's that tian woman, she won't die. She's stronger than that monster, so if she fights it one-on-one, even if it takes some time the victory will be hers.”

Like that, my so-called <Embryo>, Nemesis, analyzed the progress of battle.

“Although you've just been born, you already seem to know more stuff about this world than me, huh.”

She apparently knew about Liliana even though they hadn't met yet.

Hm, did Nemesis also have memories from the time when she was still in her oth form?

“I might have this humanoid form, but I am not a person. This is a mystery too, you know. Anyway, leaving that aside, Master? If you are feeling curious, is it not about time you tried revealing the secrets for that miracle?”

“.....”

More or less, I gradually managed to understand her, but it seemed like Nemesis was the type that liked saying things in a roundabout way. Well, I was a bit at fault too since I actually comprehended her words in the end^[1].

In short, she had said, “*Hurry up and check my abilities in the status screen.*”

When I looked at the 『Detailed Status Screen』, the 『<Embryo>』 entry had been added to it.

I tried opening it without delay; and as soon as I did, a new window appeared, displaying Nemesis’ figure and all of her parameters.

Nemesis

TYPE: Maiden-with-Arms

Attained Form: I^[2]

Equipment Offensive Power: 50

Equipment Defensive Power: 15

Status Bonuses

HP Bonus: D

MP Bonus: G

SP Bonus: F

STR Bonus: F

END Bonus: E

DEX Bonus: G

AGI Bonus: G

LUC Bonus: G

Equipment Offensive Power and Equipment Defensive Power were her numerical values when used as a weapon... this was just like what you would normally see when equipping weapons and armor.

Then, the “Bonuses” apparently were the <Embryo’s>... Nemesis’ status bonuses that were always given to me just by her being there. The values increased by these didn’t seem to be of a constant amount, and I heard that “G” was the lowest ranking of the bonuses. Incidentally, I also heard that the status growth from leveling up was also affected by them.

“Hhmm?”

She wasn’t really that strong.

It would be unfair to compare her with my bear brother’s costume, but even if we purely looked at the statuses, I didn’t believe they would ever be able to reach values as high as the ones seen in the costume.

Of course, considering that Nemesis had just been born as an <Embryo>, everything was entirely natural.

But then how did we defeat that 【Demi-Dragwurm】? While wondering this, I discovered an entry in the window labeled [Owned Skills].

『Owned Skills』

《Counter Absorption》 Lv1:

Consumes a stock to generate a wall of light that nullifies attacks.

At Lv1, a single stock is restored every 24 ingame hours. Stock limit: 2.

Active Skill

《Vengeance is Mine》:

Launches an attack at the target that does a *fixed amount of damage*, ignoring defensive capabilities.

The *fixed amount of damage* is twice the total of all damage values received from the target in the last 24 hours.

Furthermore, both the damage that was reduced by skills or items and the damage that was nullified by 《Counter Absorption》 are also added to the total damage count.

However, once the attack is launched, the total damage count for the target is reset.

Active Skill

“So it was this one...”

《Vengeance is Mine》.....an attack skill that returned in double the total damage received from the enemy.

Now I understood. It was no wonder that I managed to beat the 【Demi-Dragwurm】.

Surely, their damage was reduced by the effects of each 【Dragon Scale】, but it was still a fact that I had taken three attacks from that monster. Adding to it, there was a single strike that had been nullified by Nemesis when she used one the skills here, the 《Counter Absorption》.

Four times in total. If 10% of the attack's damage was 90, then its original value had been around 900. Multiplied by the four attacks, we reached 3600 total damage. Then, with the effect of the skill 『Vengeance is Mine』, that total damage was multiplied by two, arriving at around 7200, I think.

Well, I didn't know how much HP the Demi-Dragwurm had, but this probably meant that it wasn't more than 7200. Or maybe it was because I had struck it right in the head, I guess?

“...Even after revealing the secret behind what happened, it was still a miracle.”

That one-hit kill was possible because I was weak and my opponent was strong.

The fact that I had overcome several near-death experiences, with the help of the items given by my brother, also played a huge role.

And more than anything else, Nemesis' characteristic skills were a perfect match for that situation.

“It was a pretty convenient outcome.”

The 『Embryo』 was something unique that combined your individual qualities, personality, biorhythm and so on, right? Looking at the outcome this time, it was almost as if the 『Embryo』 had been specifically planned for that circumstance.

Also, a skill that got stronger the more damage I took? Were they trying to make me look like a super masochist or something?

“Let me tell you this in advance, this is the result of you being continuously observed. There isn't a single mistake here.”

Said Nemesis in a tone full of regret.

Wait, did she just reply to my thoughts?

“Err, observed?”

“The oth form is the period used by the <Embryo> to observe its master. When it finishes checking what kind of person they are, in accordance with what it found about said master, the <Embryo> is then born in its 1st form. Well, even if there are similarities in personal experiences and behavior, there will be differences in the <Embryo’s> form and skills according to each Master.”

I see.

In other words, *all my experiences, from the moment I began playing the game, were specifically reflected there.*

...Come to think of it, it felt like I had experienced a lot of situations where I received near-lethal damage, like in the collision with Liliana right at the start and the entire fight against the 【Demi-Dragwurm】. If this skill was the direct result from all that, then I could do nothing but accept this situation.

“...Still, I think the 《Counter Absorption》 came from your own personality, Master.”

“Hm?”

In what way?

“Aahh, by the way. It might be me saying this, but the TYPE: Maiden <Embryo> is pretty rare, you know? You ought to reflect upon how blessed you are and feel grateful to me.”

Surely, in the usual categories mentioned by Cheshire, the “Maiden” name wasn’t there.

Hm, I was really thankful that not only Nemesis might have been rare, but she also told me so much about the game; still, you see, when I thought that a young girl was something that came out of my own self, I also had this rather awkward feeling welling up inside me.

“Awkward? Really?”

Ah, was she listening to my thoughts after all?

“Yes I am! And what’s with this ‘awkward’!? What is “awkward” here? Did you not hit the jackpot!? Look at my beauty! And my rarity! Just what dissatisfied you?”

“Oh no, by yourself, Nemesis, you are not the reason for this ‘awkward’ thing. I’m talking about the fact that you came from *me* and...”

As we were having this kind of dialogue, Liliana showed up from the entrance to the <Old Loew’s Orchard>. Although her armor was dirty with mud and dust, the woman herself didn’t look seriously hurt.

“Milia!”

Instantly, as soon as she noticed our figures here, she rushed over to us. And then, Liliana breathed a sigh of relief after confirming her sister’s sleeping face.

“Thank you very much for... protecting my little sister... really, thank you...!”

While thanking me, tears were flowing from her eyes.

“Err.. hmm...”

This was embarrassing.

I had no idea how to answer her words.

“Good. You should be grateful to my Master and, above all, to this Nemesis here.”

...And that was how my <Embryo> replied.

Oh, I got it. Nemesis liked saying things in a roundabout way, but she also enjoyed looking down on others.

That personality of hers wasn’t similar to mine.

“Is this child... your...?”

“Yeah, well, she’s my *<Embryo>*.”

Looking a little surprised, Liliana observed Nemesis.

“I see, of course, since you are that man’s younger brother, you were also a *<Master>* chosen by an *<Embryo>*... but still, with a Maiden type, it’s almost like that...”

When she was about to say something,

『Alriiight!! The beary underground world couldn’t hold me down!』

Along with a “ta-da!” sound effect, my bear brother suddenly appeared from under the earth.

“...Whaaaat?”

He was alive.

Well, considering that his status had been covered in black, I still didn’t know well what to make of it. Moreover, why was it that he was holding a shovel in his right hand instead of the gatling gun?

No way, did he use it to dig through the earth until he reached this place?

『The bear-low earth tunnel is now open for visitors!!』

A second later, the ground shook slightly, and with the sound of earth and sand falling, the hole where my brother came from was closed.

『Oh no, it was instantly bearied by a cave-in!』

Shut up.

“So you were safe, big brother.”

『Yep! Those bunch of losers were mangled into mincemeat by me and Baldr’s fourth form!』

“Fourth? Wasn’t your <Embryo> that gatling gun?”

『That one from bear-fore was its second form.』

I guess there were many forms, then.

“I do not think you know this, but depending on the <Embryo>, it can freely use any of its previous forms. And the one possessed by the Grizzly Buddy is of that very kind.”

...Grizzly Buddy^[3]? Was she talking about my brother?

Yep, she was.

『Is the *dali* over there the <Embryo> bear-longing to you, Ray?』

Dark Loli. Dali for short^[4]. One name as bad as the other, anyway.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am this Ray Starling’s <Embryo>, Nemesis the Maiden-with-Arms. Please continue treating me well in the future, okay, Grizzly Buddy?”

Apparently, Nemesis had the intention of referring to my brother as “Grizzly Buddy.”

“That’s all good and well, brother, but since you were alive, you should have returned quicker. I almost died there.”

About four times.

“That would’ve been beary hard to do. After all, bear-low the ground, I have been battling that bunch of good-for-nothing demidras.”

Demidras... a *bunch* of them?

『They were freaking swarming inside a massive underground cavity. Maan, I don’t really hate bugs but that truly gave me some polar chills.』

“.....”

Those things? A swarm of them?

...I'm glad I didn't stay too long inside that dungeon.

“To think that so many of those monsters appear there... the 『Rookie Killer』 is just too scary.”

Or should I say, as expected of the trauma making machine.

『That's not it, in the first place, not even a single demidra was supposed to be living here...』

“Eh?”

『Anyway, I got rid of every demidra I managed to find down there, so they shouldn't multiply around this place anymore. Now then, leaving that aside, let's return already. We have to get Milia-chan home, you know.』

“That's right, shall we go?”

Thus, followed by Liliana and Miliane, I started on my way back to the city together with Nemesis and my bear brother.

Since the Royal Capital wasn't that far away from the dungeon, we quickly arrived, bidding our farewells as soon as Liliana and her sister passed through the gates. On that occasion, the woman affirmed, “*I will definitely return this favor,*” while the now awaken Miliane gave each of us one of her precious 『Rem Fruits』 from her basket, saying, “Thank you.”



Finally, when I was observing the two sisters, their hands joined together as they headed for home...

【The objective of the Quest “Missing Person—Miliane Grandelier” has been achieved.】

Was displayed before me, and I felt that, at long last, the quest had been completed.

“It’s finally oveer...”

Honestly, I ended up going through such an incredibly dreadful experience right at the very start of the game...

“So the reward was one rem fruit, huh? Quite shabby for all the trouble I had.”

A fruit that costed around 500 yen, I guess. Still, I believed that it had a worth beyond that.

I cleaned the rem with my clothes and took a bite. While it had a strawberry flavor, its texture felt just like an apple’s. But the taste of the fruit in my mouth was much more delicious than any strawberry or apple.

It was the sweet taste of accomplishment.

『Ookay then, time to bear-gin the celebrations! Let’s have some ursome dinner. Bear-cause today is Ray’s first day here, I have arranged in advance a great feast for you.』

“Is that so?”

『I have prepared a pile of meat and vegetables to fill our bear-llies. They are also of the beary highest grade.』

“Oho, you have honestly caught my attention.”

It seemed like it was going to be delicious. Even Nemesis apparently held the same opinion... wait, so <Embryos>

ate food too?

『As for the bearlicious dessert, I made arrangements with the 【Rem Fruit】.』

“Ooohh.....uh?”

『Just for the dinner, I went to the marketplace bearly in the morning and bought all the 【Rem Fruits】 there. It's an all-you-can-eat bearffet.』

“.....Hey.”

Surely, the reason why Miliane went to the <Old Loew's Orchard> was because they weren't selling that fruit, right?

Then, in other words...

“Damn you, bear brother, you were the one who started everythiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnggggg!!!!”

On that day, my eardrum-shattering scream echoed in the Royal Capital.

Footnotes

1. [↑] 意味が分かってしまう俺も俺だが – From what I know, the “X も X だが” has a certain nuance, indicating that while X is the cause/at fault for something (in this case, “understood the meaning in the end”), the other party (say, Y) is also mixed up in it. I’m no expert so I’m just going with this translation for now.
2. [↑] In Roman notation.
3. [↑] クマニーサン – “Kuma Nii-san” or “Bear Brother” if you were to take it literally. But “Nii-san” doesn’t strictly mean familial brother and can be used to refer to a young man (fellow/fella, buddy, etc). Naming is of course open to suggestions.
4. [↑] 黒い口リ。略して黒リ – The brother says “黒リ” or “Kurori”, joining “Kuroi” (dark/black) with “Rori” (loli). For now I couldn’t find a way to translate it while keeping the same sense of “completeness” that you usually see in the Japanese sentence, like chaining the end of the first word to start the second word (imagine something like “Unitedddy” for “United” and “Teddy”).

Epilogue A

Grizzly Buddy's Explanatory Course

“The Physiological Phenomenons and the <Embryo>” Edition

□ Ray Starling
Royal Capital, Altea
<Orion's Belt Restaurant^[1]>

That day, my brother had made a reservation for dinner at his favorite restaurant. As a place managed by players, it wasn't restricted to only serving meals; for example, if you brought your own ingredients, the restaurant would cook them for you. Apparently, my brother had given in advance a great amount of ingredients to them.

『Okay, now to celebrate Ray's first day here and also his first Quest Clear, bear-gin the cheers!』

“ “Cheers!” “

While Nemesis and I toasted with a drink similar to orange juice, my brother cheered with rem wine (fruit wine made of rem). It seemed like the game of <Infinite Dendrogram> referenced each player's real nationality in order to enforce age limits; until I reached the age of 20, I wasn't allowed to drink alcohol ingame.

To be more specific, I heard that lewd stuff was rated 18 while drinking and smoking was rated 20.

Should I say that it was something sound and wholesome? Or actually, after a certain point in time, unsound and immoral?

“Bah, because of Master’s childness, I am also restricted from drinking. It will take six years for me here, this is too long.”

“If we judged by appearance alone, among everyone here yours would be in second place for ‘one who shouldn’t be consuming alcohol’.”

My brother was the first place. And for various reasons.

I was looking at a bear costume drinking from a tankard.

『*Chomp, chew, munch, munch.* C’mom, eat until you can’t bear it anymore. Get some meat too and devour it. *Chomp, chew, munch, munch.*』

While he ate the food that had been piled on the table, my brother also encouraged us to do the same. No, wait a moment, he could still eat and drink while inside that costume? That equipment was pretty sophisticated in some weird points.

“Alright alright... *gasp!* What the, this is crazy good!”

When I tried eating the strange food my brother had offered, I was instantly surprised by its taste. Although it was made with unknown ingredients and cooking methods, for some reason I could grasp how their deliciousness had been brought out together—and that damn, it was incredibly delicious.

『The beary owner of this restaurant is a 【Cook】 of the topmost-class, the 【Star Chef^[2]】. In real world’s terms, you could say that his thoroughly trained skills are on the level of a three-star cook.』

“Still, after eating such a huge banquet here and then returning to reality, aren’t we going to suffer through a discrepancy in sensations?”

You see, at around the time for dinner in the real world I should feel hungry—not satiated.

“Come to think of it, outside of the game I’m still lying down on my

bed, right?"

『Exactly, and in this world, except for sleeping, nothing else affects us in the real world. Incidentally, even if you sleep six hours here, you will only have slept two hours in the outside world.』

And then he expanded a bit more on it.

『For instance, let's think of the fact that one day in reality is three days here. If you spend 18 hours awake and sleep 6 hours in this world, repeating the process three times, it will mean that in the real world, you will have stayed awake for 6 hours and slept 2 hours each time, for a total of 24 hours—or a whole day for that matter. When you're not asleep in this game, your brain stays awake just as usual, you know.』

In other words, if you start <Infinite Dendrogram> up before going to bed and spend all night inside it without sleeping, you'll be going to school or work while rubbing your tired, sleepy eyes.

『Then, physiological phenomenons like hunger or the need to go to the bathroom will still work normally in the outside world. Whenever your body needs anything, an announcement will appear for you.』

As if on cue, a window appeared in the corner of my eyes.

【Announcement: Urination Urge】

【Announcement: Hunger】

Hmm, I see.

"Okay then, I'll be logging out for a moment."

『Sure, come back as soon as you can, I'll bear waiting.』

"Be quick. Without you here, Master, I will not be able to eat this."

"Fine fine."

Finally, I selected the 『Log Out』 option from the 『Main Menu』.

【Now logging out】

【For the next login, would you prefer to appear on your Save Point or your current position?】

“My current position.”

【Understood】

【We await your return】

As my body disappeared from this world, like waking up from a dream, my consciousness dropped from <Infinite Dendrogram>.



“...Whoa.”

The first thing I did after logging out was to check the clock.

It had been a little less than three hours since I had started playing the game. Time really passed at a 1/3 rate inside <Infinite Dendrogram>.

After a moment of deep impression, I took a trip to the bathroom.

Then, although I had already eaten something within the game, my own body still complained in hunger, so I fed myself with a balanced nutrition bar and mineral water.

Just in case, I checked if my cell phone had received any messages or calls, but there was nothing. I also tried looking at some news sites on my PC and found nothing that particularly stood out.

Like this, about 10 minutes passed and I finally returned to the game.



『Beary nice, welcome back.』

“...Oi.”

When I returned, the dishes on the table had completely changed. He had, apparently, eaten the entire first round of food.

...How did just one person eat all that? Was that guy a bear after all?

“URRRAAHH!? The à la carte I was looking forward to is gone!”

Nemesis, who seemed to have materialized out of thin air along with me, screamed.

Wait, “URRRAAHH^[3]? Did she just go “URRRAAHH”?

『Bear at ease. There's still a beary big amount of food waiting for us. Counting with what's on the table now, I bear-live they've only served 10% of everything.』

“Why so much food!? That's enough for tens of tens of people!”

He hadn't even taken into consideration that my <Embryo> would be Nemesis, so why did he prepare so much food for just two people!?

“...Okay, fine. Anyway, brother, I still have some stuff I want to ask you about.”

“How to obtain this beary bear costume?”

“That's not it..... no, wait, I do have a little interest in that, but that's

not what I really meant.”

There were two things related to the System and one related to Liliana that I was curious about.

Guess I should start asking the easier ones.

“When the <Embryo> evolves its form also changes, right?”

『Beary correct. Baldr’s characteristic as a weapon steadily grew stronger every time. It got massively huge after some evolutions.』

And here I thought the gatling gun was already fairly large... but that was just its 2nd form. The <Embryo> couldn’t have grown any more than that, right?

『Bear the way, I couldn’t introduce it to you, but the 4th form I used today was a tank.』

“A tank!?”

There was even something like that here!?

“...Will my Nemesis also take a form other than her current, humanoid one? Like, a tank or something?”

The girl in question, who was eating beside me, shuddered as she complained with, “*Don’t jinx it.*”

『Although the <Embryo’s> evolution depends on the Master, your Nemesis should always be based on the Maiden form. The “with-Arms” part might be indicating that she could change into a different type.』

“Now that you mention it, she once changed into a sword... so how should I treat Nemesis as?”

『Like I said, she’s a Maiden <Embryo> that can transform into an Arms type. “Maiden” is, basically, a hybrid... an Embryo that’s a mix of two types.』

“Ohh.”

Somehow it looked like I’d gotten a “two for the price of one” bargain here.

“*What’s with the ‘bargain woman’ stuff!?*” came another complaint from Nemesis.

『You know, I have an acquaintance who’s like you. They also have a Maiden <Embryo>, but its “with” type is all kinds of different. And currently it has reached the <Superior^[4] Embryo> form.』

A Superior <Embryo>?

『It’s how we also call the <Embryos> that reached their 7th form. There are three moments during the evolution of an <Embryo> where it goes through massive changes. The first one is when it hatches from its 0th form. The second one is its advanced evolution from the 3rd form to the 4th. Finally, the third great change is the super evolution from the 6th form to the 7th. Currently, that 7th form is known as the <Embryo’s> final stage.』

“The ultimate stage, the <Superior Embryo>.”

I wondered if one day my Nemesis could reach that point.

Well, since she was still in her 1st form, I honestly had no idea how long it would take to finally arrive there.

『Incidentally, I heard that in this entire world, not even a hundred players have managed to reach the <Superior> stage.』

Less than a hundred out of the millions of people playing <Infinite Dendrogram>?

Just how severe was the journey to reach it...?

“Those guys must be a bunch of no-lifers.”

『It’s not like playtime is the only thing that allowed them to reach

there. There's a great number of people who have been playing since the release date and still haven't attained the 7th form. Meanwhile, within that select group, some of them have only been playing for six months.』

Did it mean that some sort of special element or factor was needed for that?

“Ah, brother, come to think of it, you're also one of those who started on the launch date, right? How far did you progress? What's your <Embryo's> highest form?”

『It-is-a-bear-se-cret.』

So annoying!

Also, what made it even more annoying was how I realized that, when explaining everything, my bear brother talked like a normal person, but whenever he wanted to poke fun at me he would add bear puns to his speech.

Meanwhile, as I chatted with the bear, Nemesis ate all the food that was on our table.

...Hey, you were the point of that conversation, you know?

Footnotes

1. [↑] 天上三ツ星亭 – “Tenjou Mitsuboshi-tei”. “Mitsuboshi” is also used to refer to the Orion’s Belt, so I went with it.
2. [↑] 天上料理人 – Read as “Celestial/Heavenly Chef/Cook”, but written as “Star Chef”.
3. [↑] That same scream from Dragon Quest.
4. [↑] 超級(スペリオル)エンブリオ – Written as “Super-class”, read as “Superior”.

Epilogue B

Grizzly Buddy's Explanatory Course “The <Master> and The First Steel vs Cavalry War” Edition

□ Ray Starling
Royal Capital, Altea
<Orion's Belt Restaurant>

And our dinner party and Q&A time continued.

“Okay then, my next question is in regard to our standing here in this world.”

『Go on.』

Thinking back upon Liliana’s speech and conduct, I then posed my question.

“Liliana called me a ‘<Master> chosen by an <Embryo>’ or something like that. She never referred to me as a ‘player’ or similar. To be honest with you, I’ve yet to comprehend what is the setting defined for us in this game—what is the players’ social standing in the world?”

Somehow, it felt like she didn’t consider me as someone playing a game.

『Hmmm, you could understand that kind of thing after looking at the Background Story in the official site, for example, but... you’d have to spend hours reading everything, so let me briefly explain it to you.』

Saying that, my brother’s “Explanatory Course, Setting of the

World” chapter began.

『There are <Masters> and “Tians” in this world. Every single one of us players are known here by the title of <Master>. It’s something close to “One who’s chosen by an <Embryo>” in meaning.』

Which reminds me, Nemesis also used “Master” when referring to me.

『A <Master> is chosen by, nurtures and uses an <Embryo>. Although they are beings of immense strength, <Masters> possess a certain limitation.』

“A limitation?”

『Their bodies end up frequently getting sent to “another world”.』

.....Hm?

『<Masters> can disappear from this world for just a few minutes, in the shorter cases, or even several days and months in the longer cases. Sometimes they return right in the place they had previously disappeared. At other times, they are transferred to a special place called “Save Point”.』

No, wait, that’s...

『However, at the very moment of a <Master’s> death, their body is immediately removed to another world with the help of their <Embryo>, allowing them to survive. In this case, though, they won’t return to this world for at least three days.』

“Basically, both the players’ penalty for dying and their logging out occasions are... included in the fundamental laws of this world?”

『That’s it.』

“.....Whew.”

Pretty thoughtful of the developers.

From the contact I had with Liliana and Miliane, I felt that their thought processes were on the same level as a normal, flesh and blood human. In order for those tians to live here without being aware that it was a game, the developers defined the players' "return to reality" and their "immortality" as fundamental laws of the world.

I see, that was better than I'd expected.

『By the way, there are players who go around touching on the subject that this world is a game, but the tians simply treat them as "poor <Masters> who lost their minds after being sent to the other world."』

“....Aaahh...”

『As a result of them disappearing at irregular intervals, there are barely any players who assume important positions in the country. Even if one were to enter a Knightly Order or something for the purpose of working as a 【Knight】, they would be given a job exclusive for <Masters> instead of the usual occupations.』

In other words, the jobs entrusted to the players were of a kind that, even if those in the middle of their shift randomly disappeared, it wouldn't cause problems.

『Well, considering that just the <Embryo> already makes you a great asset for the nation's military potential, there are many cases where the job offered to a player pays much higher than a tian's job.』

I wonder if they would order the person to do things like exterminating monsters alone.

Okay, I've taken care of the biggest question related to the game System. The next one is...

“Bro, did anything happen between you and Liliana in the past?”

『Huum, what are you talking about? I bearily have any idea.』

“Don't even try to dodge the question. Liliana acted like she clearly

knew you already.”

Additionally, she didn’t seem to hold a very good impression about him.

“What did you do?”

No way, did my brother make a *physical* move on her?

Was it something like, 『Yaay, an authentic woman knight is nearbear! Ohh, I can’t bear it anymore!!』 and then he threw his arms around her?

『I did nothing.』

However, betraying my expectations, my brother answered in a serious tone.

『Because I did nothing... she holds a grudge against me.』

“What do you mean?”

If he hadn’t done anything, why?

『This will be a long story. And in contrast to everything I’ve said until now, it isn’t something pleasant.』

“I don’t care.”

At my reply, he took a long sigh and started talking.

『Two months ago, or six considering the ingame time, there was a war. It was an aggressive military action waged by the Country of Machines, the Imperial Nation of Driphe, against the Alter Kingdom.』

Country of Machines, the Imperial Nation of Driphe.

It was one of the countries a starting player could choose to be affiliated with, a nation that developed something that would be considered heresy against the setting of a fantasy world: a technical

civilization.

.....Okay, I shouldn't have been talking about heresy when one my relatives was a tank-riding bear.

『That country's reason for attacking was their desire to take possession of Alter's fertile territories. But in the context of a game, the real reason was—a War Event.』

A War Event.

That was also something written in the game's manual.

As a large-scale battle between countries, it was supposed to be a big Quest that wagered the fates of all who were affiliated to each of those nations.

『Within such a great, decisive war, <Masters> and tians alike participated. Well, since it was an event that rarely occurred, it took the center stage of the game... nonetheless...』

My brother stopped for a moment and sighed again.

『The Alter Kingdom suffered an overwhelming defeat. It not only lost a third of its territory, but also the court magician, who was a Great Sage, half of the entire knightly order and even the king all died. In other words, what I'm saying is that many of the key people related to country's management were killed in action.』

“...How did they manage to lose so badly? Is Driphe really that strong?”

No, that was unlikely.

I could understand if it had happened in the real world, but since we were in a game, it should've had at least a way to balance the war potential between the countries.

『The nations' forces were on par with each other. National power, soldier levels and even the fighting strength of their central figures

were similar. And yet, the difference came from something that surpassed everything I've just mentioned: the <Masters'> strength.』

“So, your point is that Driphe had so many players the Kingdom could only lose to the difference in affiliated members, right?”

Driphe seemed to be the kind of country that would be greatly attractive to those who loved its main characteristics; as a result, it should have gathered a large number of players.

Still, if that was the case, wouldn't the Alter Kingdom be the same...?

『Hmm no? Alter lost because many of the <Masters> who were able to participate in the war... didn't do so.』

“What?”

I'd just heard something unexpected.

Not only it was an event that took the spotlight here, but also the fate of the Kingdom depended on that war.

So why? Why didn't they participate?

『How should I put it... the King of Alter was an “old-fashioned^[1]” individual. He was the type to boldly make a speech such as, “

The Kingdom is in a predicament. Oh, warriors of our Kingdom, now is the time to rise up and fight!

” and then stand on the front lines. And... that's it.』

“That's it?”

『He wouldn't give any rewards. The King believed that as long as someone belonged to the country, that person would naturally fight against the current predicament they faced.』

...Well, the Kingdom was in a life or death situation so it couldn't be helped, but that still felt a little stingy.

I wonder, was it because of its Middle Ages motif? Would his actions be considered "usual" from that point of view?

『Obviously, the <Masters>... the players were enjoying this world, but their lives weren't at stake here. Whether they died or the country was destroyed, the only thing that awaited them would be the 24 hour login block. Consequently, since there was nothing to gain from it, even though the Kingdom was in danger, many players found no meaning in participating in the war.』

In my case, I would've been the reverse: since the only punishment for dying was some login limitations, I would gladly take part in the fight. But, well, to each his own.

Using healing items during the battle would already incur some costs for the player; moreover, having one's equipment break while fighting a strong enemy—such as other players—would be a great downside for the individual.

『What also made a big difference regarding this matter was that the enemy, Driphe, had decided on a clear standard for its war rewards. Specifically...』

Apparently, it had been an unprecedented act.

For every soldier from the Alter Kingdom defeated, the person would receive 5000 Lirs.

For every <Embryo> holder... or <Master>, for that matter, the rewards would be 50000 Lirs.

In addition, it seemed like those who killed key figures of the Kingdom would receive, as a bonus, a great variety of benefits, such as rare items and favorable treatment within their country.

This resulted in an increase of morale among Driphe's players; on

the other hand, the motivation of Alter's players dropped considerably.

『There was even a part of the players that raised their voices, expressing things like, "I want to participate on Driphe's side," and, "If this country collapses, maybe a rare event will happen."』

“.....”

As a gamer, it wasn't like I couldn't understand the sentiments behind that.

It wasn't like I couldn't, but...

『And finally, the decisive blow that allowed for the massive defeat of the Alter Kingdom was the fact that its entire <Big Three>... the top rankers for the Suppression, Duel and Clan rankings didn't participate in the war.』

“Ranking? Does this game have that too?”

『Yep, it's that thing over there.』

Replying, my brother pointed outside of the window.

The restaurant we were currently in faced a fountain square, the same one we had previously used as our initial meeting point. He was pointing at the water... fountain's other side, where an imposing notice board was affixed.

『That's the Alter Kingdom's Ranking Board. It is updated every three months of ingame time.』

Or one month in the real world.

『First, there is the Suppression Ranking, where people compete with their accomplishments from killing monsters. Then, we have the Duel Ranking, where the competition lies in the person's own records from the PVP system. Finally, there's the Clan Ranking that compares the scale of every clan here. That Ranking Board displays the top 30

individuals from each of these specific rankings.]

“Oohh.”

『What’s important here, though, is that only those who appear in the rankings are allowed to participate in a war. But then, regarding the Clan Ranking, every single clan member from each of the 30 clans can take part in the battle, so they could even act like mercenaries, letting people temporarily join the clans in order to also participate. Actually, that was exactly what Driphe’s <Masters> did.』

...Indeed.

Still, at any rate, it meant that if a player wasn’t in any of those rankings, they wouldn’t be able to join the battles. And then, on the occasion of that war, as the Kingdom sought for the participation of the ones popularly known as the <Big Three>—those who stood at the summit of each ranking—this was what they apparently said:

“I don’t want to carelessly expose my face to the public while participating in such a large-scale event.” – The 【King of Destruction^[2]】, name unknown, Suppression Ranking’s #1 player.

“I’m not interested in a messy fight.” – The 【Over-Gladiator^[3]】, Figaro, Duel Ranking’s #1 player.

“We couldn’t reach an agreement in the negotiations with the country, so...” – The 【High Priestess】, Fusou Tsukiyo^[4], owner of <Lunar Society^[5]>, the Clan Ranking’s #1 clan.

As a result, the other ranked players’ motivation, that was already growing dangerously low, plummeted. They could already see that it would become a losing battle for the Kingdom.

When the war finally began, Alter was missing many of its ranked individuals. It seemed like the only ones who participated were a few of the ranked clans, members of various fan clubs of popular NPCs—like Liliana—and naive players, who all paid to temporarily join said ranked clans.

The outcome was... what you would call a “deplorable spectacle”.

It was nothing less than a complete trampling down that happened on the battlefield. Of course, there was the difference in player numbers, but above all, what put an end to all of the Kingdom’s hopes was the fact that, on Driphe’s side, all their top rankers had participated.

The 【King of Beasts】, name unknown, #1 player of the Imperial Nation of Driphe’s Suppression Ranking.

The 【Hell General^[6]】, Logan Godhart^[7], #1 player of the Imperial Nation of Driphe’s Duel Ranking.

The 【Giga Professor^[8]】, Mr. Franklin, owner of <Triangle of Wisdom>, #1 clan of the Imperial Nation of Driphe’s Clan Ranking.

Two of the three of them were <Masters> of a <Superior Embryo>, so their strength was simply tremendous.

Because of those top rankers on Driphe’s side, they managed to crush the King of Alter, also killing two other prominent NPCs: the Captain of the Imperial Knights and the Great Sage.

『Had things continued the way they were going, without a doubt the country would have headed for total ruination. However, right when one third of the Kingdom’s territory had already been swallowed by the enemy, a third nation, Cardina, joined the fray and commenced an invasion against Driphe. Except for the troops stationed on the captured regions, the Nation of Machines withdrew all its forces and, as a result, the Alter Kingdom barely managed to survive.』

In spite of that—continued my brother—

Cardina has already retreated from Driphe, so give it just a few more months and the Imperial Nation will come attacking this country again.

“.....”

...I see, that story was indeed unpleasant.

This city—this *country* was already on the verge of dying.

“And what about Liliana’s grudge against you?”

『I was also one of those ranked players who didn’t participate in the war. You see, even though we had enough fighting potential we didn’t join the battle, so we ended up being hated. And apparently, the previous Captain of the Knights, the one who died in battle, was Liliana and Milia-chan’s father.』

“.....Damn.”

Really, this story wasn’t pleasant at all.

“So, after hearing such an ‘unpleasant story’, what are you planning on doing about it, Master?”

Nemesis, who had spent all the time eating without participating in the conversation, questioned me.

“This isn’t a problem of what I’m going to decide, really.”

What will I choose to do when Driphe attacks?.... Well, there was no reason to trouble myself with that question because, at heart, my decision had already been made.

“You know, even if they don’t give out rewards, I don’t think I will refuse to participate. I believe that there’s worth in helping out the country, even with the costs incurred in doing so.”

From the viewpoint of it being a game event.

『Yeah, I agree with you. But at that time, the prevailing sentiment between the players was a strong desire to boycott and reject a country they deemed “rather stingy”. I even feel that, perhaps, Driphe had planned to create that kind of mood by arranging such extraordinary rewards for their individuals.』

If that was the case, then the Alter Kingdom had actually lost on the strategy camp even before the first battle broke out.

“So why didn’t you do anything, bro? Was it also because of the lack of rewards?”

『.....In my case, having my equipment break equalled to my real face being revealed to everyone.』

“.....”

Aahh, yeah.

That *was* a huge problem indeed.

『Well, after that I managed to get my hands on this sturdy 【Hind Bear】, so this time I’ll be participating.』

Certainly, from its status, the costume’s defense bonus and physical damage reduction were downright amazing.

But no matter how you looked at it, that bear was simply a joke equipment.

『Nevertheless, even if I’m taking part in the next war, the other side will have strengthened their forces even further. Our side, on the other hand, will be weakened, so things might become pretty severe.』

“Weakened?”

『After the Kingdom’s defeat, there was a “Defection Event”, where many players switched their affiliation to another country. It was so bad that even some of the NPCs left the country, and on private BBS^[9] people often said things like, “Alter Kingdom? Not even the bread I bought last month is as stale as that,^[10]” and, “It. Is. Over.^[11]”』

“.....”

There was defecting, people becoming refugees and a widespread sense of resignation.

This seemed pretty realistic, the course of events leading to the collapse of a country.

『In the latest update, 70% of the ranked players were replaced...』

“Huumm.”

Conversely, it could be said that there was now an opportunity to become a “ranker”.

“Then, I guess I’ll start my journey with this mindset.”

Listening to that story, I settled on a course of action.

Or rather, my course of action remained the same, but my *goals* increased.

“Have you decided on a new objective?”

Upon hearing Nemesis’ voice, I nodded.

“The current me won’t be able to do much, so I can’t participate in that war.”

That’s why...

“First, I will try leveling up... with the aim of becoming one of the ranked players.”



■ Earth A chat room in a certain place

【Shogun has joined】

【beastking has joined】

Current Users: Professor, Shogun, beastking

Professor: g'evening everyone.

Shogun: Good evening.

beastking: sup.

Professor: Okay now.

Professor: Have you two seen the video I sent through <Infinite Dendrogram>?

beastking: yep.

Shogun: That's why we're here, right?

Professor: Certainly, it is.

Professor: Well then, regarding the latest attempt at culling prominent tians, if I were to say a single word about it...

Professor: Ahh, it was a failure.

Shogun: A failure it was.

Professor: I had filled that dungeon with *that*, you know.

Professor: Well, the swarm of Demi-Dragwurms was completely wiped out...

Shogun: Wasn't there a flaw in your strategy in the first place?

Shogun: I mean, giving the target's little sister an incense that repelled insects and then "leading" her to the orchard

Shogun: just to catch the target in a trap was a flawed plan in itself.

Professor: Originally, I had arranged for something different...

Professor: But for some reason the rem fruits had disappeared from the market.

Professor: Even the small share I had planned to use for the strategy was gone, lol.

Professor: That sucked you know.

Professor: I was going to give a poisoned rem to the pretty little sister.

Professor: And then she would poison and kill her big sis for me...

Professor: Lil'Sis: “Big sis, happy birthday!!”

Professor: Big Sis: “Oh thank you, ugha agh!”

Professor: Lil'Sis: “Big siiiiissss!!!”

Professor: ...Or that was how it was supposed to be. Damn it, that was such a shame riiight!? Sniff sniff, lol.

Shogun: The problem here isn't your bad luck whatsoever.

Shogun: I'm talking about how your revised strategy was thwarted.

Professor: Maan, that bear was scary.

Professor: Going alone against nearly one hundred Demi-Dragwurms

Professor: and then obtaining a “flawless” victory? I've never seen something like that.

Professor: Lol, each one is equivalent to a player with an Advanced job.[\[12\]](#)

Shogun: That wasn't a really impressive feat.

Shogun: It's something that could be done by a strong and highly leveled player... even I could do that.

Shogun: But... a jobless, level 0 individual managed to defeat a Demi-Dragwurm.

Shogun: I don't remember this kind of antics being done before.

Professor: Oh my, does this mean that his Excellency, the Shogun, is being cautious regarding the rookie instead of that bear?

Shogun: Sigh... I'm looking forward to crushing him.

Professor: There you go again with the evil boss[\[13\]](#) routine.

Professor: But I'm also eager to do it! Lol.

Shogun: You fool! I'm being serious here.

Professor: lol.

Shogun: Still, I can't deny the "evil" part.

Shogun: "The Fall of a Kingdom", this will be the first significant event in the game.

Shogun: Driphe can't... no, we can't wait for the opportunity to achieve that.

Professor: Well, last time it ended with some key people and part of the territory taken, it was a damn lot...

Shogun: I had fun fighting the Captain of the Imperial Knights.

Professor: The king was so boring.

Professor: It would've been way better if I had fought a mass of soldiers.

Shogun: And the Great Sage... was it the beast king who killed him?

Professor: That one was crazy impressive. As expect of our greatest fighting force.

Shogun: Oi

Professor: Yeah yeah, alright. Your Excellency the Shogun and the beast king are our greatest fighting force, lol.

Shogun: Hmpf, whatever. I'll show it to you in the next war.

Shogun: This time we will choke the life out of the Alter Kingdom.

Professor: Yeah, lol, you gotta show me what you've got, okay?

Shogun: By the way, the beast king has been silent all this time. Aren't you going to say anything?

beastking: the bear... was very... cute.

Shogun:

Professor:lol

Shogun:I can't get your tastes at all.

Footnotes

1. [↑] 古い人物 – Here he uses an adjective “古い” (old), that is only used for objects, to qualify a person (人物). From what I understood, he did that to say that it wasn't like the King was an old person, but actually someone behind the times.
2. [↑] 破壊王(キング・オブ・デストロイ) – The furigana reads as “King of Destroy” but that's just probably one more “engrish” thing since the Kanji reads as “Destruction King/King of Destruction”.
3. [↑] 超闘士(オーヴァー・グラディエーター) – The furigana reads as “Over-Gladiator” while the Kanji reads as “Ultra/Over Fighter” and the “fighter” part (闘士) can also form the word “gladiator” (剣闘士).
4. [↑] 扶桑月夜 – Her name means something like “Japan” (扶桑 – Fusou, classical name for Japan) and “Moonlit Night” (月夜 – Tsukiyō).
5. [↑] 月世の会 – Lunar Society, Lunar World Society, Lunatic Society, etc.
6. [↑] 魔将軍(ヘル・ジェネラル) – “Hell General” for the furigana, “Demonic Shogun/General” for the Kanji.
7. [↑] ゴッドハルト – Gotthard, Godhard, Godhartt, etc.
8. [↑] 大教授(ギガ・プロフェッサー) – Read as “Giga Professor”, written as “Great/Large Professor” (大教授).
9. [↑] 掲示板 – Bulletin Board, usually refers to Bulletin Board Systems (BBS).
10. [↑] アルター王国はオワコン – That was a massive liberal take on it. Basically, the “Owakon” (オワコン) is short for “Owatta Kontentsu” (終わったコンテンツ) or “Finished/Done Content”. It's a slang that refers to things (shows, products, etc) and used when people want to say it is already past its prime, dated, not enjoyable anymore. I'm open to suggestions on what to use for that.
11. [↑] オワタ – Similarly, “Owata” is a meme/slang originated on 2ch, used to basically say that something “is over, there's no return, no hope” (like “life” for example, which was its original use in “My life is over”, just search for it on google).
12. [↑] 一体で上級職一人分ですのにねえ(笑) – I'm not 100% sure on

~~this line. Here's how I interpreted it: (一體で) One monster (上級職一人分) enough for a superior ranked job.~~ Thanks for pointing out, Cestina.

13. [↑] テンプレ悪幹部ロール – He's saying that the Shogun is assuming the clichéd role of the “evil boss/leader/executive”.

Credits

Translation by [Hot Cocoa Translations](#).

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